The Idiot

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF FYODOR DOSTOEVSKY

Fyodor Dostoevsky was born into a noble family in Russia. His father was a doctor. As a child, Dostoevsky suffered from ill health, and developed an early love of literature. His mother died of tuberculosis when he was a teenager, and his father died two years later. It was around this time that Dostoevsky, like the hero of *The Idiot*, Prince Myshkin, began to suffer from epilepsy. Not long after, he started gambling, a habit that became a lifelong problem for him. Dostoevsky's first novel, *Poor Folk*, was published in 1846. During this period, Dostoevsky became interested in socialism, although he clashed with other socialists over the issue of religion, as he was a devout adherent to the Russian Orthodox Church. He joined a reformist group named the Petrashevsky Circle, who were denounced to the authorities. Dostoevsky and the other members were sentenced to death by firing squad, but at the final moment, just before they were about to be shot, the sentence was switched to hard labor in Siberia. In the prison camp there, his health worsened. After being released, he married his first wife, Maria, in 1857. Their marriage was passionate but troubled. In 1864 Maria died, and in 1867 Dostoevsky married his second wife, Anna. He was deeply in debt due to his gambling addiction. He and Anna had four children, two of whom died in infancy. During the 1870s, Dostoevsky health declined, and in 1881 he died of a pulmonary hemorrhage.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Historical events do not play a prominent role in the novel in any immediate sense, yet there are several key aspects to the historical context of Russia in this period that help illuminate the narrative and its themes. One of the most important of these is the atmosphere of reform that dominated Russia in 1861-1862, when the novel is set. In 1861, Tsar Alexander II abolished serfdom, a major change that helped eliminate social inequality and stimulated the rise of the urban middle classes. In addition, Alexander's legal reforms involved abolishing capital punishment, which is a major motif in the novel. At the same time, it is important to remember that these reforms didn't come from nowhere. Alexander was responding to the rise of dissident ideologies, including socialism, anarchism, atheism, and nihilism, the latter of which is one of the central concerns of the novel. The tsar and other elite members of Russian society hoped that by introducing moderate reform, they would quell the revolutionary spirit of these new social and intellectual movements. (In the long term, they were proven wrong—very wrong.)

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

The Idiot is part of a rich and famed tradition of 19th century Russian novels. Dostoevsky's two other most famous novels—*The Brothers Karamazov* and *Crime and Punishment*—address many of the same themes as the *The Idiot*, including innocence and guilt, Christianity and atheism, violence, and suicide. One of the writers most often linked to Dostoevsky is Leo Tolstoy, whose most famous novels *Anna Karenina* and *War and Peace* use a similar realist style as *The Idiot* and similarly experiment with ways of depicting human psychology. Tolstoy's *A Confession*, which describes his religious awakening, is likened to *The Idiot* in the sense that both books explore Christianity, moral goodness, and what makes life meaningful in the face of apparent absurdity. Ivan Turgenev's *Spring Torrents*, published in 1871, also explores philosophical themes much like *The Idiot* does, questioning if love can be innocent or if it necessarily descends into destructive passion. Meanwhile, *The Idiot* is one of a large number of novels that feature a Christ figure. Others include Charles Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities*, Herman Melville's *Billy Budd*, Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*, and John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Idiot
- **When Written:** 1867-1869
- **Where Written:** Switzerland and Italy
- **When Published:** 1868-69 in serial form; 1874 as a complete work
- **Literary Period:** Realism
- **Genre:** Novel
- **Setting:** St. Petersburg and Pavlovsk, Russia, 1861-1862
- **Climax:** The book is structured around several scandalous, climactic scenes, including when Nastasya throws Rogozhin's money in the fire, the argument between Myshkin and the nihilists in Pavlovsk, the fight at the Vauxhall in Pavlovsk, Ippolit's attempted suicide, and when Nastasya abandons Myshkin at the altar.
- **Antagonist:** Parfyon Rogozhin
- **Point of View:** Third person

EXTRA CREDIT

Bad Press. When *The Idiot* was first published, it received almost universally negative reviews, both within Russia and

across Europe.

A Modern Twist. Elif Batuman, a contemporary Turkish-American writer, has named both the books she has published thus far after novels by Dostoevsky. Yet her novel called *The Idiot* is a far cry from the subject matter of Dostoevsky's text—it depicts a freshman student at Harvard in the 1990s.

PLOT SUMMARY

Prince Myshkin is on a train pulling into St. Petersburg, Russia. He is sitting next to Rogozhin, a young man with a "malicious smile," and Lebedev, a foolish clerk. Myshkin has been receiving treatment for epilepsy in Switzerland for almost five years, and has no money; Rogozhin, on the other hand, has just inherited an enormous fortune. Rogozhin has been trying to seduce the beautiful Nastasya Filippovna, and is going to see her that night.

Myshkin goes to the house of his distant relative, Mrs. Lizaveta Prokofyevna Epanchin. Lizaveta and her husband, General Epanchin, are wealthy and well-respected. They have three unmarried daughters in their early 20s: Alexandra, Adelaida, and Aglaya. Myshkin and General Epanchin meet in Epanchin's office. At first Epanchin is suspicious of Myshkin, but then comes to like him, offering him a job, some money, and a place to stay with his associate, Ganya. Ganya may be about to marry Nastasya; Totsky, Nastasya's wealthy guardian who sexually abused her as a teenager, has offered an enormous sum for her dowry. Ganya seems a little hesitant about the engagement. After this conversation, Myshkin speaks with the four Epanchin women and greatly charms them. Ganya asks Myshkin to help him express his love for Aglaya one last time, but Aglaya coldly rejects him.

Myshkin goes to Ganya's family's apartment, where he meets Ganya's father General Ivolgin, his mother Nina, his brother Kolya, and his sister Varya. They have one other tenant, an unpleasant person named Ferdyshchenko. Varya's suitor, Ptitsyn, is also there. A fight breaks over the prospect of Ganya's potential marriage to Nastasya, which Nina and Varya oppose because Ganya is clearly just doing it for money. At that moment, Nastasya herself arrives. She attempts to be friendly with the Ivolgins, but ends up embarrassing General Ivolgin by revealing that an anecdote he told about himself was actually stolen from a recent newspaper article. A huge, rowdy group of people enter, including Rogozhin, who offers Nastasya 100,000 roubles for her hand in marriage.

Later that same evening, Myshkin invites himself to Nastasya's birthday party, having failed to get the drunk and wayward General Ivolgin to take him there. At the party, Nastasya insists they play a game wherein every person goes around and says the worst thing they've ever done. However, none of the stories are that shocking, and some even contain boasts about good deeds embedded within them. Nastasya quickly announces that she is bored.

Rogozhin arrives, and places the 100,000 roubles he promised Nastasya on the table. Nastasya comments that she has a lot of suitors now, but as soon as she leaves behind the luxurious lifestyle Totsky provides, no one will want her anymore. Myshkin says he would, and also notes that he's due to inherit 1.5 million roubles and shyly agrees to marry Nastasya when Ferdyshchenko suggests the engagement. The party erupts in joy, toasting Myshkin's imminent fortune and well as his engagement to Nastasya. However, Nastasya soon notes that she might still choose Rogozhin. She throws the 100,000 roubles into the fire, tells Ganya to get them, and leaves.

Myshkin does not end up receiving his full inheritance, only a small fraction of it. Nastasya keeps repeatedly abandoning Rogozhin before agreeing to marry him again. In the beginning of June, the Epanchins leave for their dacha in Pavlovsk. Back in St. Petersburg, Myshkin goes to Rogozhin's decidedly gloomy house and beholds Rogozhin's copy of Holbein's painting "The Dead Christ." Myshkin is horrified by it, remarking that it could turn a man into an atheist. After Myshkin leaves the house, he feels Rogozhin's eyes on him. Becoming increasingly delirious, he encounters Rogozhin on the stairway in his hotel. Rogozhin tries to stab him, but at this point Myshkin starts having an epileptic fit, and Rogozhin runs away. Myshkin tumbles down the stairs and injures his head in the midst of the fit, but is taken to a doctor and survives the fall.

Lebedev takes Myshkin to be nursed back to health at his *dacha*. The Epanchin women come to visit, in a state of great concern about Myshkin's health. Kolya notes that Aglaya won't stop talking about "the poor knight," a character from Cervantes' *Don Quixote* and a recent poem by Pushkin whose penchant for unconditional love seems to represent Myshkin.

During the Epanchins' visit, four young men barge into Lebedev's *dacha*: Burdovsky, Keller, Ippolit, and Doktorenko. They declare that Burdovsky is the illegitimate son of Myshkin's late benefactor, Pavlishchev, and that Myshkin has "stolen" Burdovksy's inheritance. Calmly and graciously, Myshkin proves that they are lying, but offers them money anyway. Humiliated, Burdovsky refuses. Meanwhile, Mrs. Epanchin is getting increasingly worried that Aglaya and Myshkin are going to get married, although Aglaya still often speaks about Myshkin in an insulting way, calling him a "little freak" and an "idiot."

At a gathering at the Epanchins', Evgeny, a young friend of the family, discusses whether there could ever be a truly Russian form of liberalism. Myshkin then discusses criminals. Aglaya declares that she will never marry Myshkin because he is a "ridiculous man," and Mrs. Epanchin suggests they all go to the vauxhall to hear some music before a fight breaks out. At the

vauxhall, Nastasya tells Evgeny in a rather jolly tone that his uncle is embroiled in a scandal involving missing government funds and has killed himself. A passing officer comments that Nastasya should be whipped, at which point Nastasya grabs a whip and whacks the officer. Myshkin also gets involved, trying to defend Nastasya.

Rogozhin informs Myshkin that Nastasya wants him and Aglaya to get married so they can both be happy. Myshkin is horrified by this. However, he then remembers it is his birthday and transitions into an unexpectedly happy mood. He suggests they go back to Lebedev's *dacha* to drink champagne. There, so many people have been waiting to see Myshkin that an impromptu surprise party has begun.

At the party, Ippolit, who is terminally ill with tuberculosis, gathers everyone together and retrieves a document from his pocket to read. It is entitled "A Necessary Explanation," and is a speech about his life, his illness, and his thoughts on nihilism. The document is melodramatic long-winded. he audience, who didn't want to hear it in the first place, quickly grow bored. Once the reading is finally over, Ippolit declares he is going to shoot himself, though few people believe him. He tries, but it turns out the cap was not on the gun, and to his mortification he survives completely unharmed.

At her request, Myshkin meets Aglaya in the park early the next morning. She expresses frustration with her life and asks Myshkin to help he run away from home. She then reveals that Nastasya has been writing her letters.

The same day, Lebedev realizes that his wallet has gone missing, and he realizes that the prime suspects are Ferdyshchenko and his dear friend General Ivolgin, who has only recently been released from debtor's prison. He decides to track Ferdyshchenko down in St. Petersburg, despite Myshkin expressing doubts that Ferdyshchenko is the real thief.

Later, Aglaya shows Myshkin the letters Nastasya has written to her, in which Nastasya declares that she is in love with Aglaya but says that she hopes Aglaya and Myshkin get married. Meanwhile, news spreads that Myshkin and Aglaya are engaged, when in fact this arrangement is certainly not official, and possibly not even happening at all. Lebedev returns from St. Petersburg and at first spends every second with Ivolgin; however, the two then have a fight and stop talking. Speaking privately with Myshkin, Ivolgin expresses his annoyance that Lebedev has disrespected him, and tells an obviously false story about meeting Napoleon as a boy. Shortly after, Ivolgin suffers a stroke.

Mrs. Epanchin is hysterically upset about the idea that Myshkin and Aglaya might get married. Aglaya becomes increasingly rude to Myshkin and eventually declares that she will never marry him. This has a strangely positive effect on Myshkin, putting him in a happy mood. The Epanchins arrange a gathering in which they hope to introduce Myshkin to their high society friends. Aglaya sarcastically tells Myshkin that he should break Mrs. Epanchin's beloved, extremely expensive Chinese vase during the event.

At the beginning of the gathering Myshkin stays quiet, and makes sure that he is far away from the vase. However, after one of the guests mentions that Pavlishchev converted to Catholicism, Myshkin goes on a wild rant about how the Catholic Church is "unchristian" and worse than atheism. He becomes so impassioned that he travels toward the vase without noticing and knocks it over. He fears that Mrs. Epanchin will be devastated, but she actually laughs it off, saying it doesn't matter.

Shortly after, Nastasya, Aglaya, Myshkin, and Rogozhin all meet at Nastasya's friend Darya's *dacha*. Aglaya curses Nastasya for interfering in her life, and Nastasya replies that she could take Myshkin if she wanted to. Aglaya runs away, but before Myshkin can go after her Nastasya faints in his arms. Before he knows it, he finds himself banned from speaking to Aglaya and engaged to Nastasya again.

Rumors fly about what Myshkin did to Aglaya—many of them untrue—and even his closest friends are highly disapproving. Myshkin manages to explain to Evgeny that he loves both women and never intended to choose Nastasya over Aglaya. The night before the wedding, Nastasya expresses horror at the idea that she will ruin Myshkin's innocence. The next day, just as the ceremony begins, Nastasya sees Rogozhin in the crowd and runs to him, demanding that he take her away.

Myshkin is largely unperturbed by being stood up at the altar, but soon after goes to St. Petersburg to try and find Nastasya and Rogozhin. After looking all over the city, he eventually runs into Rogozhin, who takes him to his gloomy house. Rogozhin shows Nastasya's dead body to Myshkin, confessing that he stabbed her. The two speak for a while, and then each fall into a separate delirium. The police come and arrest Rogozhin he is sentenced to 15 years' hard labor in Siberia. Myshkin, meanwhile, goes back to the Swiss Institute for more treatment, this time paid for by Evgeny. Aglaya marries a man who pretends to be an exiled Polish count but is in reality no such thing. She converts to Catholicism and becomes estranged from her family.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Prince Lev Nikolaevich Myshkin – Prince Myshkin is the central character, and the novel's eponymous "idiot." Myshkin is 26 years old at the time the novel begins, and is described as having blond hair and blue eyes with a "quiet but heavy" gaze. He suffers from epilepsy and returns to Russia after spending almost five years being treated by Professor Schneider in a Swiss institution. Profoundly good, innocent, and morally

"perfect," Myshkin charms almost everyone but nonetheless struggles to abide by the social customs that dictate life back in Russia. He is often misunderstood and taken advantage of by those around him due to his childlike innocence and naïveté. Rather than recognizing his upright morality as a marker of wisdom, characters (including Ganya, Aglaya, and Mrs. Epanchin) mistake this quality as foolishness and write him off as an "idiot" whenever he makes a mistake. A Christ figure, Myshkin practices a form of Christianity based on humility, forgiveness, and love. He becomes very close to several of the characters in the novel as they are drawn to his pure spirit, including the Epanchin family, to whom Myshkin is distantly related and goes to stay with after he returns from Switzerland. Early on, he finds out that he is set to inherent 1.5 million roubles (which eventually falls through), a revelation that causes others to be even more drawn to him. Myshkin develops a special connection with Aglaya Epanchin, to whom he briefly and informally gets engaged, although she calls it off. Myshkin is also twice engaged to Nastasya, a woman who scares him with her scheming and brazen social nonconformity, but whom he nonetheless has a desire to love and protect from those who try to take advantage of her. When Nastasya leaves Myshkin at the altar to run away with Rogozhin, Rogozhin ends up murdering her. As a result of this shock, Myshkin suffers a relapse of his illness. At the end of the novel he returns to the Swiss asylum, where Schneider declares that his condition is likely incurable.

Aglaya Ivanovna Epanchin – Aglaya is the youngest daughter of General and Mrs. Epanchin, and most beautiful of her sisters, Alexandra and Adelaida. She is bright, lively, and rebellious, with big ambitions. She often finds life with her family frustrating, and at one point plans to run away from them. When the novel begins, she has already turned down an offer of marriage from Ganya, a handsome young man who works for Aglaya's father and is motivated by her extravagant dowry. Aglaya becomes attached to Myshkin, but repeatedly claims that she doesn't love him, laughs at him, and is often quite cruel to him. She does so because she, like Myshkin, is very innocent, and has trouble processing the strong feelings she has for him. Thus, she and Myshkin try to have an adult relationship and an engagement, but their affections for each other prove to be on-again, off-again at best. Aglaya becomes paranoid that Myshkin still loves Nastasya, and eventually abandons Myshkin altogether on the basis of that relief. She ends up marrying a fraud who poses as a wealthy Polish exile, converts to Catholicism, and becomes estranged from her family.

Nastasya Filippovna Barashkov – Nastasya is a young woman with a dark, haunting beauty. Orphaned as a child and sexually abused by her guardian, Totsky, she believes that she is now permanently corrupted and does not deserve lasting happiness or a healthy relationship. This leads her to act in an outlandish, scandalous manner that shocks everyone while successfully asserting her dominance and power. For example, she writes letters which simultaneously profess her love for Aglaya, another woman, and which encourage Myshkin and Aglaya to be together romantically. She creates a spectacle wherever she goes, doing everything from making up stories about being involved in scandals to hitting a police officer who bothers her on the street. It seems that she behaves in this manner simply to rebel against the oppressive societal standards and male oppression that are inflicted upon her. Many men are in love with Nastasya due to her beauty and enticing nature, and want to control her and buy her affection. She appears to want to marry Myshkin, but seems to think that she is not good enough for his staunchly moral, endlessly forgiving nature. She ends up choosing Rogozhin instead, a man who is the exact physical and moral opposite of Myshkin instead, seemingly because she believes that she deserves someone corrupt rather than innocent. After they run away together, Rogozhin stabs her to death. Her murder traumatizes Myshkin, sending him into an incurable bout of epilepsy.

Parfyon Semyonovich Rogozhin – Rogozhin is a cruel, greedy, and corrupt young man, the opposite of Myshkin. Though he is a non-noble, at the beginning of the novel he inherits an enormous sum of money. When Myshkin is arriving in St. Petersburg after being treated for epilepsy in Switzerland, he meets Rogozhin on the train. At first, the two are friends, but Rogozhin gradually turns on Myshkin as the story progresses and eventually tries (and fails) to stab him to death. Rogozhin is an atheist and has little regard for morality, making him a direct foil to Myshkin, who is a devout Christian and Christlike figure and acts in an unyieldingly innocent, moral, and forgiving manner throughout the novel. This is emphasized by the copy of Holbein's "The Dead Christ" that hangs in Rogozhin's dark, gloomy house, a disturbing painting that casts atheistic doubt on the Christian faith that is foundational to Myshkin's character. Rogozhin is in love with Nastasya due to her beauty, and desperately offers her 100,000 roubles to marry him, which Nastasya throws in the fire. She does eventually agree to marry Rogozhin instead of Myshkin, but Rogozhin's passion for her is a highly destructive and violent force. He beats her while they are together and ends up murdering her. At the end of the novel, Rogozhin is sentenced to 15 years hard labor in Siberia for Nastasya's murder.

Mrs. Lizaveta Prokofyevna Epanchin – The wife of General Epanchin and the mother of Aglaya, Alexandra, and Adelaida. Myshkin is distantly related to her, and goes to stay with the Epanchin family when he returns to Russia after being treated for epilepsy in Switzerland. A caring woman, Mrs. Epanchin has a tendency to react hysterically to minor issues and greatly exaggerate her problems. She becomes very close with Myshkin, although at certain points in the novel she pushes him away, because the way he behaves jars with the elegant, proper, high society lifestyle she craves for herself. She is also terrified

of the idea that Myshkin will marry Aglaya, since those around him believe that his innocence renders him unfit for a romantic relationship. Mrs. Epanchin's friendship with Myshkin ends up having a profound effect on her. This is best demonstrated by her calm, kind reaction near the end of the novel when Myshkin accidentally breaks an expensive Chinese vase that was given to her as a gift.

Gavrila Ardalionovich Ivolgin (Ganya) – Ganya is a handsome young man who works for General Epanchin. He is the son of General and Nina Ivolgin and the brother of Kolya and Varya. Arrogant, greedy, and proud, he knows that he is ordinary but dreams of being "original." However, he isn't courageous enough to act on this desire. He agrees to marry Nastasya for the enormous dowry that Totsky has in place for her, but is then humiliatingly rejected by her. He wants to marry Aglaya, but is rejected by her as well.

Lukyan Timofeevich Lebedev – Lebedev is a comic character, a clerk who prides himself on knowing all the society gossip. Even in the midst of tragic things that happen to him, such as the death of his wife, he maintains a silly manner and a habit of drinking excessively. However, he also has some profound insights into certain philosophical issues, such as socioeconomic inequality and capital punishment.

Ippolit Terentyev – Ippolit is a 17-year-old boy who is dying of tuberculosis. An ardent nihilist, he yearns to be taken seriously and attempts to dramatically leave the world. He delivers rambling, self-absorbed, nihilistic speech entitled "A Necessary Explanation" to Myshkin, Nastasya, and Rogozhin, and many others at a party at Lebedev's dacha. After this, he attempts to commit suicide by shooting himself with the gun he's had since he was a child. This entire plan backfires, as everyone grows bored with his speech, and when it comes time to kill himself he fails to do so because there is no cap in the gun. After this incident, Ippolit's illness progress and he eventually dies.

Varvara Ardalionovna Ivolgin (Varya) – 23-year-old Varya is the only daughter of General and Nina Ivolgin. She is Ganya and Kolya's sister. A practical person, she marries the wealthy Ptitsyn just when her family's finances fall to a truly desperate state. She is also constantly trying to help Ganya move up through the world, although the two at times have a tense relationship.

General Ardalion Alexandrovich Ivolgin – General Ivolgin is a friendly drunkard who is prone to telling elaborate lies. He is Nina's husband and Ganya, Kolya, and Varya's father. He is having an affair with Mrs. Terentyev, from whom he frequently borrows money. He goes to debtor's prison and, upon his return, suffers a stroke that kills him.

Nikolai Ardalionovich Ivolgin (Kolya) – Kolya, a teenage schoolboy, is the youngest child of General and Nina Ivolgin. He is Ganya and Varya's brother. Although he occasionally flirts with nihilism and dreams of running away from home, deep down he is an innocent, devoted young man who is somewhat similar to his dear friend Myshkin.

Afanasy Ivanovich Totsky – Totsky is an extraordinarily rich and high-ranking middle-aged man who was previously the guardian of Nastasya after she was orphaned as a young girl. Beginning when she was 16, it is implied that Totsky sexually abused Nastasya over a number of years. When she vows to seek revenge on him he becomes afraid of her, and (unsuccessfully) attempts to buy her off by providing her with a luxurious apartment and offering a huge dowry for her marriage.

Antip Burdovsky – Antip Burdovsky is a young nihilist who tries to trick Myshkin out of his inheritance by claiming to the be the illegitimate son of Pavlishchev. Myshkin exposes Burdovsky as a fraud, though out of kindness and generosity still offers him money. Humiliated, Burdovsky refuses the offer, but later apologizes to Myshkin and asks for forgiveness.

Princess Belokonsky The grandmother of Aglaya, Alexandra, and Adelaida Epanchin. Though Belokonsky looks down on Mrs. Epanchin and treats her poorly, her opinions still matter to Mrs. Epanchin, since Belokonsky is highly influential in their social circle. Belokonsky's positive view of Myshkin makes him more well-liked by the other members of the Epanchin family.

MINOR CHARACTERS

General Ivan Fyodorovich Epanchin – General Epanchin is a wealthy and well-respected figure in his mid-50s. The son of a "common soldier," Epanchin received little education but nonetheless managed to rise to high status within Russian society. He is a slightly calmer influence when compared to his wife, Lizaveta.

Alexandra Ivanovna Epanchin – Alexandra is the oldest child of General and Mrs. Epanchin, and the sister of Aglaya and Adelaida. At the beginning of the novel she is set to marry Totsky. However, after Totsky fails to marry off Nastasya, their engagement is cancelled.

Adelaida Ivanovna Epanchin – Adelaida is the middle child of General and Mrs. Epanchin, and the sister of Aglaya and Alexandra. She marries Prince Shch.

Pavlishchev – Pavlishchev was a friend of Myshkin's father who became Myshkin's benefactor, paying for his treatment at the Swiss institute.

Professor Schneider – Professor Schneider is the doctor who treats Myshkin for epilepsy in Switzerland.

Ferdyshchenko – Ferdyshchenko is a vulgar, immoral 30-year-old man who Nastasya always has hanging around. Most people cannot stand him.

Marie – Marie was a poor woman who lived in the same village in Switzerland as Myshkin when he was being treated for epilepsy there. She suffered from tuberculosis and was

ostracized by the other villagers, but Myshkin was kind to her.

Mrs. Nina Alexandrovna Ivolgin – Nina is the long-suffering wife of General Ivolgin. She is 50 years old.

Ivan Petrovich Ptitsyn – Ptitsyn is a wealthy young man of about 30 who is a close friend of Ganya and who later becomes Varya's husband. Formally homeless, he built a fortune in the financial industry.

Mrs. Terentyev – Mrs. Terentyev is an immoral woman who neglects her children, including Ippolit.

Darya Alexeevna – Darya is a wealthy, beautiful friend of Nastasya's.

Salazkin – Salazkin is a lawyer who informs Myshkin about his 1.5 million rouble inheritance.

Prince Shch. – Prince Shch. is a handsome, high-ranking young man who becomes Adelaida's husband.

Evgeny Pavlovich Radomsky – Evgeny is a handsome, high-ranking, intelligent and charming man who has is eye on Aglaya, but is ultimately rejected by her. At the end of the novel he becomes Myshkin's new benefactor, paying for Myshkin's epilepsy treatment back at the Swiss institute.

Vera Lukyanovna Lebedev – Vera is Lebedev's adult daughter. A sweet, slightly simple girl, she becomes fond of Myshkin while he is living at Lebedev's dacha in Pavlovsk.

Keller – Keller is a young man who is part of the band of nihilists that includes Burdovsky, Ippolit, and Doktorneko.

Chebarov – Chebarov is the lawyer Burdovsky uses to try and claim Myshkin's fortune.

Prince N. – Prince N. is a wealthy and high-ranking 45-year-old man who has the reputation of being a heartbreaker.

Ivan Petrovich – Ivan Petrovich is Pavlishchev's cousin. He attends the fancy party hosted by the Epanchins. (His last name is not provided, but he is not the same person as Ptitsyn, although they share a first name and patronymic.)

Vladimir Doktorenko Doktorenko is a young nihilist and Lebedev's nephew.

TERMS

Dacha – The Russian word for a country house or a vacation home. Owning a *dacha* is a status symbol for the upper class in *The Idiot*. In the novel, **Lebedev** and the Epanchin family have neighboring dachas.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

INNOCENCE V. FOOLISHNESS

The Idiot explores the question of what profound, total moral innocence would look like, and whether this might be taken for foolishness. The novel's main character, Prince Myshkin, is a totally pure human being who is admired and adored by other characters but is also often characterized as a fool (or an "idiot"—hence the book's title). The book shows that this characterization of the prince as a fool is mistaken, as Myshkin is actually very insightful. Rather than being a form of foolishness, moral innocence is, in fact, a kind of profound wisdom.

The people around Myshkin do not understand that his innocence is a form of wisdom because they mistake it for other forms of innocence, which are (rightfully) associated with ignorance or foolishness. For example, he is often perceived as childlike, such as when the unnamed elderly schoolteacher comments, "The prince blushes at an innocent joke like an innocent young girl." The form of innocence that children and especially "young girls" are thought to have is morally pure, but also unknowing and naïve. Blushing at an "innocent joke" would suggest that Myshkin is oversensitive. He may be morally upstanding, but he is also oblivious to the full reality of the world, which—it is implied—would make him more tough and cynical. Similarly, at one point, Keller tells Myshkin, "Oh, Prince, your view of life is still so bright and innocent, and even, one might say, pastoral!" Again, this comment affirms Myshkin's innocence while insinuating that this innocence is necessarily a form of ignorance or naivety. The word "still" emphasizes the idea that Myshkin is childlike or sheltered, and that once he encounters the reality of the world his innocence will necessarily be lost. Meanwhile, the term "pastoral" contrasts Myshkin's pure and old-fashioned view of the world (which is linked to a simple, rural way of life) with the weary cynicism of city-dwellers.

Indeed, at this point in Russian history, the vast majority of people living in the countryside were uneducated, illiterate, and deeply religious peasants, while in the cities bourgeois and aristocratic individuals (such as the characters in the novel) debated modern theories of socialism, nihilism, and atheism. As such, Keller's comment that Myshkin has a "pastoral" view of the world emphasizes the idea that Myshkin is backwards and naïve. This false belief is strengthened by the fact that Myshkin has spent the past five years literally sheltered from the world in a medical institution in Switzerland, receiving treatment for epilepsy. Many of the characters perceive Myshkin's illness as not only *producing* innocent foolishness, but as a kind of innocent foolishness in and of itself. Describing Myshkin early in the novel, General Epanchin says that he is "a perfect child, and even quite pathetic; he has fits of some illness." Again, the

fact that the general calls Myshkin a "child" when he is actually an adult shows how Myshkin's epilepsy infantilizes him in the minds of others. Furthermore, the general's pairing of "perfect" and "pathetic" indicates that even while the characters recognize the prince's profound moral innocence, they see it as a form of vulnerability akin to his illness. In reality, Myshkin's epilepsy does at times impair his cognitive faculties, but his moral purity is actually a way in which he balances or overcomes this by having special insight into the world.

The association of innocence and foolishness is also cemented in the minds of the characters by the figure of the *yurodivy* or "holy fool," also known as "fool for God" or "fool for Christ." Rogozhin tells Myshkin, "You come out as a holy fool, Prince, and God loves your kind!" These words convey the simultaneously revered and denigrated status of holy fools in Russia at the time. Rogozhin acknowledges that Myshkin is sacred and beloved by God, but there is an obvious patronizing note to his comment. In a bourgeois urban climate of moral cynicism and increasing atheism, being a holy fool is seen as retrograde and silly. Ultimately, however, the book shows that other people's views of Myshkin are mistaken. His innocence is not actually a form of foolishness, but rather a remarkable form of insight and wisdom. Sometimes the other characters get close to recognizing this, although they usually are not able to fully understand it. For example, Doktorenko accuses the prince of being "so good at exploiting your…hm, sickness (to put it decently)," in order to socially manipulate people according to his wishes. He concludes "It's either all too innocent, or all too clever…you, however, know which." These words indicate that Doktorenko believes that innocence and cleverness are opposites, and that being clever necessarily means being scheming and deceptive. The truth is that Myshkin's innocence actually provides him with a special form of intelligence, affording him powerful insight into personalities and social dynamics.

Similarly, in the same passage in which Keller calls the prince "pastoral," he also exclaims that he is "confounded" by Myshkin's insight into the minds of others: "For pity's sake, Prince: first such simple-heartedness, such innocence as even the golden age never heard of, then suddenly at the same time you pierce a man through like an arrow with this deepest psychology of observation." Keller begs for the prince to explain this "contradiction." Yet what the book actually shows is that there is really no contradiction at all. The character of Myshkin shows that true, profound moral innocence is actually a very powerful and incisive type of wisdom, not a form of foolishness.

MONEY, GREED, AND CORRUPTION

The Idiot depicts a world corrupted by money and greed. At a time when moral and religious values—along with social hierarchies and norms—are in flux, greed becomes a powerful force driving people's actions. The novel's Christian viewpoint drives its message that while all people have an innate moral innocence, this can be corrupted by the consequences of money and greed: selfishness, exploitation, cruelty, and even violence. A capitalist system of value, therefore, corrupts people's sense of right and wrong, replacing it with a fixation on money and power. The arbitrary and unpredictable fluctuations of wealth mean that it is a bad indicator of true value. In fact, the novel suggests that there is usually a negative correlation between the amount of money someone has and how good a person they are.

In order to understand the novel's depiction of money and greed, it is important to consider the social and historical context of the period in which it is set. In the 1860s, Russia was an imperial power ruled by a despotic monarchy, alongside an aristocratic elite and an extremely rich, influential church. Yet change was in the air: non-aristocrats could ascend the social hierarchy through activities like serving in the army or growing rich in business. Meanwhile, Tsar Alexander II abolished serfdom in 1861, which, among other things, allowed former serfs to own property and businesses. This sense of flux is reflected in the novel when it comes to the financial situation of the characters. Despite being a prince, Myshkin arrives back in Russia "without a penny." At the time, nobility and wealth did not necessarily have a direct correlation (although it is important to bear in mind that despite coming from one of the oldest lineages in Russia, Myshkin is a rather minor nobleman). Where some members of the aristocracy have very little money, some non-nobles, such as Rogozhin, are extremely rich. When Myshkin later learns that he is due to inherit a large amount of money, it serves as yet another reminder of how quickly people's fortunes can change and confirms the sense that society as a whole is in a state of flux.

One of the characters through which the theme of money, greed, and corruption is most thoroughly explored is Nastasya Filippovna. Born to an aristocratic but poor family and orphaned as a child, Nastasya was placed under the care of Totsky, a rich, greedy, and evil nobleman who sexually abused her. As a figure who represents wealth and power, Totsky is an unequivocal example of how money and greed lead to moral corruption. The question of who Nastasya will marry, which is one of the novel's central plotlines, further emphasizes the idea of money as a corrupting force. Wanting to marry off Nastasya so he himself can marry Alexandra Ivanova, Totsky offers 75,000 roubles for her to Ganya, even though Ganya actually hates Nastasya. Nastasya knows that Ganya is only willing to marry her for the money; the narrator comments that "Ganya's soul was dark, greedy, impatient, envious, and boundlessly vain, out of all proportion to anything." As a result, she comes to see herself an object with a price. Feeling that her value as a person has been corrupted by the fall from innocence that resulted from Totsky's sexual abuse, Nastasya senses that the only value

she has left is financial. Money, then, is portrayed as a morally corrupting force rather than a vehicle for freedom and upward mobility.

This tragic demonstration of the corrupting impact of money comes to a dramatic head when the wealthy Rogozhin offers 100,000 roubles to marry Nastasya in what amounts to a kind of auction, and Nastasya throws the roubles in the fire, telling Ganya to get them if he wants them. On one hand, this scene is a painful reminder of how women are treated as commodities that can be auctioned off to the highest bidder. Yet Nastasya's act of throwing the money into the fire shows that she rebels against the obsession with money that preoccupies those around her. By burning the roubles, Nastasya scandalously draws attention to the ultimate meaninglessness of money. In contrast to moral values, money is ephemeral and can disappear in an instant. Indeed, Nastasya's act suggests that the best way to purge oneself of money's corruption influence is to deliberately rid oneself of money. This is reflected in Myshkin's habit of giving money away. At the same time, there are still limits to Nastasya's rejection of money. Turning down an offer from the prince, she ultimately decides to marry Rogozhin, who beats her and ends up murdering her. This turn of events suggests that it is perhaps impossible to ever truly escape the corrupting impact that money has had on society.

Surprisingly, it is the comic and usually foolish character Lebedev who articulates the novel's overall position on money, greed, and corruption, and who issues a warning about how these issues are poisoning Russia as a whole. Lebedev gives a long, rambling speech in which he discusses the extreme poverty that exists in Russia and wonders how poor people "endure." He notes the injustice of the high taxes that the poor must pay to the church, arguing that clergymen are "sixty times fatter" than the general population. The speech concludes, "There is greater wealth, but less force; the binding idea is gone; everything has turned soft, everything is overstewed, everyone is overstewed! We're all, all, all overstewed!" While "overstewed" is a rather humorous term to use, Lebedev's overall point is deeply serious: money and greed have corrupted Russian society to a dangerous degree. The book suggests that it is perhaps only by purging oneself of both money and greed that this corruption can be undone.

SOCIAL HIERARCHY, AUTHORITY, AND REBELLION

The world of *The Idiot* is structured by strict social hierarchies that bestow authority based on factors such as rank, wealth, and gender, rather than on one's actual character as an individual. This creates an unjust and unsustainable social system, which the novel takes a critical stance against. Yet although hierarchy and authority are shown to be very important, it is also clear that rebellions against them are occurring all the time. Characters are constantly rebelling against rules, norms, and expectations, suggesting that the hierarchies in place are not as firm as they might first appear. The novel suggests that it is indeed possible to resist hierarchy and authority in order to bring about a more just society, but that there are severe limits to the efficacy of such rebellions. Furthermore, some forms of rebellion are more effective than others.

In order to understand the theme of social hierarchy, authority, and rebellion, it is important to pay attention to the historical context of Russia during this era. In the 1860s, Russia was still structured according to a fiercely unequal social system in which the monarchy, aristocracy, and the church exercised unchecked power, while the poor masses suffered in difficult conditions, paid steep taxes, and were generally denied the right to education. Unsurprisingly, this dramatic inequality created social unrest, which is manifested in the novel not only through the many discussions of atheism and nihilism, but also in more subtle, everyday forms of rebellion. Much of the social unrest of the novel is organized around particular radical intellectual traditions, most significantly atheism and nihilism. Characters such as Ippolit and Doktorenko embrace nihilism not only as a way of explaining what they perceive to be the truth of the world, but also as a framework for rebelling against the hierarchy and authority that structure society. While the book does not suggest that the young nihilists' critiques are entirely wrong, it does show that allegiance to such radical ideology is not necessarily the best way to rebel against societal injustice. For example, when Ippolit dramatically reads his philosophical treatise entitled "A Necessary Explanation" and attempts to kill himself after, the result is a resounding failure. Everyone is bored by the "Explanation" and unsurprised when his suicide is unsuccessful. Meanwhile, when Burdovsky and the other young nihilists attempt to trick Myshkin out of his inheritance, they reveal themselves to be hypocritical and foolish, and end up humiliated. Overall, the nihilists struggle to actually live out the ideas to which they have attached themselves, thus failing to effectively rebel against the societal standards they reject.

Prince Myshkin's form of rebellion against authority and hierarchy, while perhaps not always more successful, is presented as more admirable than that of the nihilists. This is arguably because Myshkin's rebellion begins with actions rather than ideology. For example, Myshkin is known as a radical "democrat," not because he identifies himself as such, but because he makes a habit of engaging in conversation with all people, regardless of rank. Similarly, Myshkin is highly critical of Catholicism due to the intensely hierarchical, authoritative, and imperial nature of the Catholic church. Yet he does not just state this critique, he also *lives* it by embodying what the book suggests is the true form of Christianity. As a Christ-like figure, Myshkin criticizes unjust forms of authority *and* acts on these critiques by showing love, compassion, and forgiveness to

everyone around him. At the same time, the novel also shows that this form of rebellion, while more successful than that of the nihilists, is also severely limited by the reactions of others. For example, when Myshkin reacts to the young nihilists' attempt to trick him out of his inheritance with kindness and forgiveness, offering Burdovsky a smaller amount of money, Burdovsky refuses and Myshkin is left cursing himself for being an "idiot." His act of kindness may arguably have been right in the moral sense, but it is perhaps not the best way to trigger social change because of the cruelty and corruption of others.

The most doomed form of rebellion depicted in the novel, however, is almost certainly Nastasya's attempt to rebel against the constricting gender norms imposed on women. The patriarchal society in which Nastasya lives placed her at the mercy of Totsky, the male guardian who abused his power over her through sexual exploitation. Nastasya then goes on to suffer similar cruelty from Ganya, who tries to marry her for money, and Rogozhin, who is jealous and possessive, beats her, and ultimately kills her. Nastasya does not accept any of this treatment without a fight; indeed, she is arguably the most rebellious character in the novel. Her constant scandalous behaviour—which includes throwing Rogozhin's money in the fire, writing letters to Aglaya saying that she is in love with her, and ditching Myshkin at the altar—shocks and horrifies those around her. In this sense, Nastasya does manage to effectively rebel against the authority and hierarchy governing society.

However, it is also true that Nastasya is repeatedly suppressed and punished for her actions, and ultimately ends up being brutally murdered by Rogozhin after she runs away with him. The other characters constantly call her a "madwoman," and even suggest she should be tied up or whipped. Her rebellions may have had an impact on those around her, but she was ultimately powerless against the violent authority of patriarchy. The novel thus ends on a somewhat pessimistic note about the effectiveness of rebellion, although it also emphasizes the importance of refusing to accept unjust hierarchy and authority—even if this comes at great personal cost.

ABSURDITY AND NIHILISM

The Idiot contains an extensive depiction of nihilism, a philosophical movement that became popular in Russia in the 1860s. Nihilists were heavily critical of the existing structures, laws, and norms, which they held were arbitrary and wrong. They asserted that existence was fundamentally meaningless. The novel shows how the difficulty and absurdity of life might indeed compel someone to embrace a nihilistic worldview. However, through the character of Prince Myshkin, it ultimately takes a stand against nihilism, which it suggests is a misguided reaction to pain and absurdity.

In the novel, nihilism is mainly explored through the small group of young people who explicitly align themselves with the movement, including Ippolit, Doktorenko, and Burdovsky. Each character has different reasons for embracing nihilism, and perhaps the most sympathetic of these is Ippolit's story. At only 17, Ippolit is very ill from consumption (tuberculosis) and has been told that he will die very soon. In despair at the injustice and absurdity of having his life cut so short, Ippolit adopts a nihilist worldview. He decides to commit suicide, explaining, "Nature has so greatly limited my activity by her three-week sentence that suicide may be the only thing I still have time to begin and end of my own will." It is easy to feel sympathy for Ippolit and to understand why the dire circumstances of his life might lead him to conclude that existence itself is illogical and meaningless. However, the way he enacts his beliefs ends up painting nihilism as a somewhat foolish and childish reaction to the horrors of the world. This is conveyed most emphatically by Ippolit's philosophical treatise, "A Necessary Explanation," which he reads before a large audience of party guests. While the essay is meant to be dramatic (as immediately indicated by the epigraph, "*Après moi le deluge…*" / "After me the flood"), it actually just leaves everyone feeling bored. Most of the audience is not convinced that Ippolit actually intends to commit suicide. General Ivolgin, for example, comments, "He won't shoot himself; it's a boyish prank." When Ippolit's attempt fails, he is left deeply embarrassed, trying to assure everyone that he really did mean to kill himself. Ippolit's boring essay and failed suicide attempt are metaphors for the general failures of nihilism. Although not entirely misguided, nihilism reacts to insightful observations about the world in an unhelpful and childish manner (as conveyed by Ivolgin's phrase "boyish prank"). Perhaps the most important criticism the book makes of Ippolit's form of nihilism is the fact that it is fundamentally selfish. Ippolit's worldview and actions remain focused on himself—even if that means killing himself.

Although they are not necessarily recognized as nihilists, some of the female characters in the novel also react to the absurdity of life by embracing the philosophy. Mrs. Epanchin expresses concern about the prospect of her daughters "growing up into nihilists," and wonders if Alexandra Ivanovna is a nihilist or "simply a fool." Mrs. Epanchin's words highlight the contradictory way in which nihilism is constructed in the minds of the characters—particularly older adults. On one hand, Mrs. Epanchin implies that nihilism is basically a form of foolishness, and thus assumedly shouldn't be taken too seriously. On the other hand, she is very worried about the prospect of her daughters embracing nihilism, showing that the movement may be more powerful than many characters want to admit. Similarly, although she does not explicitly identify with it, Nastasya arguably behaves in the most stridently nihilistic way in the book. Reacting to the bleak absurdity of being orphaned as a child, sexually abused by her guardian, and put at the mercy of suitors who do not care about her, Nastasya loses all respect for social convention. Her rebellious behavior could certainly be read as an example of nihilism in action. However, because she is a woman, she is not viewed as a nihilist in the traditional

sense. Moreover, her actions have only a very limited impact on the world around her, beyond causing scandal.

The obvious contrast here is the behavior of Myshkin. Like Ippolit, Myshkin is sensitive to the absurdity and injustice of the world and deeply affected by it. However, rather than turning to nihilism, Myshkin's reaction is to be as kind, merciful, and generous as possible to his fellow human beings. In this sense, it is less important whether Myshkin's Christian worldview or a nihilist worldview is actually correct. What matters is that the prince has a positively transformative impact on the world, whereas the nihilists in the novel do not manage to change the absurd nature of life that they are rebelling against, and are instead dismissed as ridiculous.

PASSION, VIOLENCE, AND CHRISTIANITY

The Idiot is a novel preoccupied with violence and death. It depicts a harsh world in which people behave brutally toward one another and where the presence of death haunts all the characters. Understanding the novel's treatment of violence and death requires focusing on the extent to which Prince Myshkin is constructed as a Christ figure. Violence and death play very important roles in Christianity and in the story of Jesus's life. In Christian traditions, Jesus's crucifixion and the days leading up to it are known as the Passion, based on the Latin word *passionem*, which means suffering and enduring. In the novel, "passion" is connected to violence and death via both this original, Latinate sense and its contemporary meaning of intense, wild emotion. Unchecked passion is shown to be the major cause of violence, and thus the novel takes a cautionary position when it comes to such dangerous passion. At the same time, the novel also indicates that insofar as violence and death are inevitable parts of earthly existence, Christians must learn to endure them as Jesus did during the Passion, and as Myshkin does throughout the narrative.

In the novel, violence is often triggered by sexual passion. This is true of Totsky's abuse of Nastasya, Rogozhin's beating (and murder) of Nastasya, and Roghozin's knife attack on Myshkin. In each case, male sexual obsession and jealousy leads to brutal violence which is often cyclical in nature. (The fact that Nastasya was abused by Totsky, one could argue, encourages her to embrace the similarly violent and cruel Rogozhin instead of marrying Myshkin—a decision that ultimately leads to her death.) As a result, the novel takes a rather suspicious position when it comes to sexual passion. The novel does suggest that all humans have an innate fascination with violence and death—often with disastrous results. In Ippolit's "Necessary Explanation," he explains that as a child he became fascinated by duels and highway robberies, and that this is when he acquired the pistol with which he then attempts to kill himself. Even Myshkin tells Aglaya that when he saw an execution, "I didn't like it at all, and I was a bit ill afterwards, but I confess I watched as if I was riveted to it, I couldn't tear my eyes away." The prince's words suggest that even the best people are inexplicably drawn to violence and death, even if this is to their own detriment.

One of the main motifs in the narrative is capital punishment, which the novel suggests is morally wrong. Intriguingly, this position is conveyed less by philosophical reasoning, and more by representing the absolute horror involved in executions. In particular, several characters become fixated on the moment at which a condemned person knows that they are going to die. Prince Myshkin conveys this sense of horror in discussing the execution he witnessed: "And imagine, to this day they still argue that, as the head is being cut off, it may know for a second that it has been cut off—quite a notion!" Myshkin's words are echoed by Lebedev in a discussion of the death of Madame du Barry during the French Revolution. Madame du Barry was a noblewoman and the official mistress of King Louis XV. Lebedev explains that just before she was executed by guillotine, she begged to be afforded just one more moment of life; he comments: "When I read about this countess's cry of one little moment, it was as if my heart was in pincers." Myshkin and Lebedev's discussion of the moment just before an execution suggests that some forms of violence and killing—including capital punishment—are too terrible to be imposed on any human being, no matter their crime. Indeed, many would argue that this is another manifestation of the novel's Christian principle that violence should be avoided at all costs and that matters of life and death should be left in the hands of God.

Of course, capital punishment is a particularly significant issue in Christianity due to the fact that Jesus was killed this way. The crucifixion of Jesus represents the hubris of human authority and the terrible sin of human violence toward the weak and vulnerable. In the story of the Passion, Jesus is abused, assaulted, and tortured, but does not defend himself or fight back. Instead he endures this violence right up to the point of being nailed to the cross (hence the word *passionem*). In *The Idiot*, Myshkin behaves in a remarkably similar manner, enduring both literal and nonliteral violence at the hands of others without ever fighting back. For example, when Ganya slaps Myshkin while Myshkin is defending Nastasya, Myshkin does not retaliate. Similarly, he also does not fight back when Rogozhin attacks him with a knife, instead falling into an epileptic fit, which could symbolically be read as an act of self-harm that prevents Rogozhin's violence from going any further.

Although the novel on one hand suggests that violence is a pervasive part of human existence, it also suggests that the right way to react to violence is through the Christian tradition of self-sacrifice known as turning the other cheek. Indeed, following Christian philosophy, it suggests that there might even be something redemptive or sanctifying about enduring violence without enacting violence oneself in return.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in blue text throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

HOLBEIN'S "THE DEAD CHRIST"

Hans Holbein's painting referred to as *The Dead Christ* in the novel (the full title of the real painting, which was completed around 1520-22, is *The Body of the Dead Christ in the Tomb*) represents atheism and the Christian struggle to maintain faith. When Myshkin goes to Rogozhin's dark and gloomy house, he sees a copy of the painting, and exclaims that a person could lose their Christian faith from looking at it. Rogozhin replies that this is indeed what has happened—indicating that he, like several other characters in the novel, is an atheist. Later, another atheist, Ippolit, describes seeing Rogozhin's copy of the painting, and gives a long speech (part of his "Necessary Explanation") about why it is significant. He points out that usually, when painters portray the dead Christ, they still try to make him look slightly beautiful, even as they also depict his wounds and deprivation. Yet in the Holbein painting, Christ looks like a real corpse: skeletal and rotting. Ippolit says that if this is what Jesus's followers really saw after he was taken down from the cross, they would not be able to believe in the resurrection.

In a sense, Holbein's *The Dead Christ* could be interpreted to represent atheism. The fact that the painting is hung in the gloomy house of the immoral, atheistic character Rogozhin immediately indicates this, as does the fact that Ippolit takes it up in his speech about nihilism. The painting poses the idea that Jesus was not in fact the son of God, but just a man, and that he had an extraordinarily brutal death for no reason at all. At the same time, Myshkin's fascination with the painting perhaps suggests that what it represents is not necessarily atheism, but the Christian struggle for belief. Christians must confront the fact that Jesus was indeed a man and that he suffered terribly during the passion and crucifixion. Indeed, gazing at the disturbing image of Christ's dead body in the Holbein painting might precisely enable this confrontation. A significant challenge of the Christian faith is to reconcile the reality of Jesus's human suffering with the belief that he was also the Son of God, and that his suffering redeemed humanity. In this sense, the possibility of atheism is always lurking within the Christian struggle for belief, a paradox that is explored through the novel's depiction of the Holbein painting.

THE CHINESE VASE

Mrs. Epanchin's beloved, expensive Chinese vase represents the extremely delicate social norms and etiquette of high society—norms that Myshkin fails to understand and frequently violates, usually by accident. Myshkin's breaking of the vase also represents the prophetic inevitability of human error. When Mrs. Epanchin introduces Myshkin to her elite circle of noble friends, Aglaya is unsupportive of the idea. Instructing Myshkin on how to behave among them, she sarcastically tells him to break a beloved, extremely expensive Chinese vase that Mrs. Epanchin once received as a gift by gesturing with his arms. Terrified, Myshkin feels that Aglaya's words have cursed him and that he is now doomed to break the vase. The vase, then, which is highly valuable in a monetary sense, symbolizes luxury, power, and the elite classes—yet it also highlights how ultimately meaningless these things are. Myshkin is a morally pure and perfect person, and his difficulty in abiding by the rules of high society shows how superficial and ridiculous these rules are.

Despite sitting as far away from the vase as possible, before long Myshkin forgets himself and ends up knocking it over just as Aglaya predicted. When it breaks, Myshkin's greatest feeling is not, shame or shock, but rather astonishment that Aglaya correctly predicted it would happen. In this sense, the vase also represents predestination and unavoidability of human error. At the same time, after the vase is broken, everyone present is kind to Myshkin about it, including Mrs. Epanchin, who adored the vase so much. Whereas before, she was overly obsessed with the superficial aspects of life, through knowing Myshkin she has gained a new sense of perspective. In this way, when the vase breaks it helps set Mrs. Epanchin free from her obsessions over meaningless things. She understands what is really important in life, and cares less about expensive objects and elitist people.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Vintage edition of *The Idiot* published in 2003.

Part One, Chapter One Quotes

"And are you a great fancier of the female sex, Prince? Tell me beforehand!"

"N -n-no! I 'm . . . Maybe you don't know, but because of my inborn illness, I don't know women at all."

"Well, in that case," Rogozhin exclaimed, "you come out as a holy fool, Prince, and God loves your kind!"

Related Characters: Prince Lev Nikolaevich Myshkin, Parfyon Semyonovich Rogozhin (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 15

Explanation and Analysis

Prince Myshkin and Rogozhin meet while sitting next to each other on a train pulling into St. Petersburg. Myshkin, who is epileptic, has been living in a clinic in Switzerland for over four years and is now returning to St. Petersburg for the first time. Rogozhin, who is about to inherit an enormous sum of money, is in love with Nastasya Filippovna and desperate to woo her. As they pull into the station, Rogozhin asks Myshkin to come and see him, promising that they will go to see Nastasya together. In this quotation, Rogozhin takes Myshkin's lack of sexual experience as evidence that he is a "holy fool."

Holy fools were both sacred and silly figures in Russia at the time, and Rogozhin's comment is not a compliment in any straightforward sense. He may find Myshkin's innocence charming, and perhaps admirable, but he also views Myshkin as naïve and silly. This establishes a trend in the novel, wherein other characters view Myshkin's innocence as a form of childishness and idiocy, rather than the form of wisdom and moral purity it truly is. It also emphasizes the stark contrast between Myshkin and Rogozhin, paired characters who are foils to one another. Whereas Myshkin is totally innocent and good, Rogozhin is corrupt and dangerous.

Part One, Chapter Four Quotes

❝ But another rumor he involuntarily believed and feared to the point of nightmare: he had heard for certain that Nastasya Filippovna was supposedly aware in the highest degree that Ganya was marrying only for money, that Ganya's soul was dark, greedy, impatient, envious, and boundlessly vain, out of all proportion to anything; that, although Ganya had indeed tried passionately to win Nastasya Filippovna over before, now that the two friends had decided to exploit that passion, which had begun to be mutual, for their own advantage, and to buy Ganya by selling him Nastasya Filippovna as a lawful wife, he had begun to hate her like his own nightmare. It was as if passion and hatred strangely came together in his soul, and though, after painful hesitations, he finally consented to marry "the nasty woman," in his soul he swore to take bitter revenge on her for it and to "give it to her" later, as he supposedly put it.

Related Characters: Nastasya Filippovna Barashkov, Gavrila Ardalionovich Ivolgin (Ganya), Afanasy Ivanovich Totsky, General Ivan Fyodorovich Epanchin

Related Themes:

Page Number: 50

Explanation and Analysis

Totsky has attempted to secure himself from being tormented and threatened by Nastasya Filippovna by paying for her to live comfortably in St. Petersburg and arranging a marriage for her with a 75,000 rouble dowry. This will allow him to marry Alexandra, General Epanchin's eldest daughter. In a conversation with Totsky and the general, Nastasya has agreed to accept the dowry and consider the possibility of marrying Ganya, although she also stresses that she will not be "rushed" in her decision. Totsky remains nervous, largely for the reasons outlined in this quotation.

The truth is that Ganya is marrying Nastasya for the money and actually hates her, but the fact that Nastasya knows this is strange, considering that she has agreed to consider Ganya's proposal. This convinces Totsky that Nastasya has a scheme of her own, and is thus in danger of out-scheming him, General Epanchin, and Ganya. Consequently, this is one of many moments in which Nastasya manages to assert her own power after being placed into a position of powerlessness, as she is able to manipulate the situation in her favor despite the authority that Ganya and the other men have over her. Like many other characters in the novel, Ganya has been corrupted by selfishness and greed. The broader problem of how all social relations have been corrupted by money emerges in the phrase "to buy Ganya by selling him Nastasya Filippovna." In the world of the novel, people are treated as commodities, and this often turns life into a "nightmare," a word used twice in this short passage.

Part One, Chapter Five Quotes

❝ "I'm always kind, if you wish, and that is my only failing, because one should not always be kind. I'm often very angry, with these ones here, with Ivan Fyodorovich especially, but the trouble is that I'm kindest when I'm angry. Today, before you came, I was angry and pretended I didn't and couldn't understand anything. That happens to me—like a child."

Related Characters: Mrs. Lizaveta Prokofyevna Epanchin (speaker), Aglaya Ivanovna Epanchin, General Ivan Fyodorovich Epanchin, Alexandra Ivanovna Epanchin, Adelaida Ivanovna Epanchin

Related Themes:

Page Number: 57

Explanation and Analysis

Having charmed General Epanchin, Myshkin is introduced to Epanchin's wife Lizaveta Prokofyevna and their three daughters. They have lunch together and discuss the Myshkin family genealogy, although they cannot figure out how Myshkin and Lizaveta are related to each another. They then discuss kindness, and Lizaveta admits that she feels that her kindness is almost a "failing." Her words explore the idea that kindness (or, put differently, innocence) is important, but only up until a point. If a person is unfailingly kind all the time, even when someone has been an unjust to them, it can become a problem.

Mrs. Epanchin's words also highlight a connection between innocence and childlike foolishness. When she got angry earlier, she decided to pretend to be ignorant rather than expressing her true emotions, and she frames this behavior as childish. This recalls other characters' descriptions of Myshkin, whose moral innocence they view as a form of childish foolishness. The rest of the narrative to come will explore the question of whether Mrs. Epanchin is correct in framing too much kindness as equal to foolishness, or whether it is an admirable virtue.

Part One, Chapter Six Quotes

❝ "He told me he was fully convinced that I was a perfect child myself, that is, fully a child, that I resembled an adult only in size and looks, but in development, soul, character, and perhaps even mind, I was not an adult, and I would stay that way even if I lived to be sixty. I laughed very much: he wasn't right, of course, because what's little about me? But one thing is true, that I really don't like being with adults, with people, with grown-ups—and I noticed that long ago—I don't like it because I don't know how."

Related Characters: Prince Lev Nikolaevich Myshkin (speaker), Professor Schneider

Related Themes:

Page Number: 74

Explanation and Analysis

At the Epanchins' house, Myshkin tells Mrs. Epanchin and her three daughters about his time in Switzerland. He tells the story of how he took pity on Marie, an impoverished woman in the village who was suffering from tuberculosis, and encouraged the local children to be kind to her. This led the adults in the village to demonize Myshkin and forbid the children from speaking to him. Here, Myshkin shares that Professor Schneider, who treated him at the institute, argued that Myshkin was actually a child himself.

Myshkin takes this opinion somewhat literally and thus does not agree (as shown by his rhetorical question: "what's little about me?"). Yet Myshkin's own stated affinity for children and confusion about the adult world shows that he actually views himself as somewhat childlike, too. Yet where certain characters in the novel view childishness as something to be ashamed of, Myshkin does not appear to see anything wrong with it. Indeed, the story he has just told about Marie suggests that a childlike nature is actually indicative of moral innocence and wisdom more than it is of misguided foolishness. Myshkin's mystification with the adult world does not stem from ignorance, but rather from his inability to embrace the corruption and cynicism that dominates adult life. Though adults view him as their inferior, in reality his childlike purity makes him morally superior.

❝ "Maybe I'll be considered a child here, too—so be it! Everybody also considers me an idiot for some reason, and in fact I was once so ill that I was like an idiot; but what sort of idiot am I now, when I myself understand that I'm considered an idiot? I come in and think: 'They consider me an idiot, but I'm intelligent all the same, and they don't even suspect it . . .' I often have that thought."

Related Characters: Prince Lev Nikolaevich Myshkin (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 75

Explanation and Analysis

Myshkin tells the Epanchin women about his affinity for children, and about Professor Schneider's assertion that Myshkin himself is a child in adult form. Here, Myshkin reflects on his return to Russia, and wonders if he will be seen as a "child" and an "idiot" there, too. This is a crucial passage because it contains Myshkin's most explicit reflection on his status as an "idiot" in the eyes of some other characters. He does not seem overly bothered by this view, although he acknowledges that it is incorrect and that it confuses him. Significantly, Myshkin believes that his illness at points turned him into an "idiot," which highlights his own distress over the mental incapacitation caused by his epilepsy.

Yet, while Myshkin's epilepsy causes other characters to pity him and serves as a physical parallel to the internal weakness that others falsely perceive in him, it is not the

main reason why some of them decide that he is an idiot. Rather, it is Myshkin's total moral innocence that bewilders others and leads them to conclude that he must be unintelligent. They come to believe that anyone so purely good must be stupid. In fact, as the novel will show, Myshkin's purity is not a form of idiocy, but actually of wisdom.

Part Two, Chapter Six Quotes

"It's clear that it made no difference to this 'poor knight' who his lady was or what she might do. It was enough for him that he had chosen her and believed in her 'pure beauty,' and only then did he bow down to her forever; and the merit of it is that she might have turned out later to be a thief, but still he had to believe in her and wield the sword for her pure beauty. It seems the poet wanted to combine in one extraordinary image the whole immense conception of the medieval chivalrous platonic love of some pure and lofty knight; naturally, it's all an ideal."

Related Characters: Aglaya Ivanovna Epanchin (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 249

Explanation and Analysis

Everyone is in Pavlovsk for the summer, and a large number of guests have come to visit Myshkin at Lebedev's *dacha*, or country house. The conversation turns to the "poor knight," a character from a recent poem by Pushkin. Aglaya greatly admires the poor knight, and here she explains why. This passage contains dramatic irony: it might not be obvious to Aglaya herself, but there is a striking resemblance between the poor knight and Prince Myshkin. Like the knight, Myshkin loves everyone with an unconditional, platonic love. This is why he fell in love with Nastasya and saw her as a pure, untainted woman. However, it also explains why he might love Aglaya as well. Similar to the knight's unconditional love for his lady, Myshkin displays a Christlike acceptance for everyone. While this is admirable to a certain extent, it also puts him at risk of being misunderstood, belittled, or taken advantage of by those around him. Additionally, based on Aglaya's words about the knight, this passage implies that perhaps she is in love with Myshkin, too.

Part Two, Chapter Seven Quotes

"Nihilists are still sometimes knowledgeable people, even learned ones, but these have gone further, ma'am, because first of all they're practical. This is essentially a sort of consequence of nihilism, though not in a direct way, but by hearsay and indirectly, and they don't announce themselves in some sort of little newspaper article, but directly in practice, ma'am; it's no longer a matter, for instance, of the meaninglessness of some Pushkin or other, or, for instance, the necessity of dividing Russia up into parts; no, ma'am, it's now considered a man's right, if he wants something very much, not to stop at any obstacle, even if he has to do in eight persons to that end."

Related Characters: Lukyan Timofeevich Lebedev (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 257

Explanation and Analysis

At Lebedev's *dacha*, or country house, Aglaya recites a poem by Pushkin, while Evgeny Pavlovich arrives with General Epanchin and announces that he will be temporarily resigning from the military. Vera then tells Myshkin that four angry men are waiting to speak to him, one of whom is Pavlishchev's son. While all the guests discuss the angry men and what they could possibly want, someone comments that they are nihilists. In this passage Lebedev explains that they go "further" than nihilists, essentially by putting their ideas into practice. He indicates that most for most adherents, nihilism is merely an ideology. These young men are enacting what they believe are nihilist principles, and this arguably makes them dangerous.

Although it is a little drunken and confused (as we have come to expect from Lebedev), this quotation nonetheless provides a useful introduction to some of the main principles of nihilism, along with its role in the novel. Lebedev indicates that nihilism is not seen as something embraced by stupid people, but rather the educated, elite class, who are inclined to publish their thoughts on it in "some sort of little newspaper article." However, it is rare to see nihilists actually acting on these thoughts. Lebedev indicates that put into practice, nihilism could lead to merciless violence and chaos.

Part Two, Chapter Nine Quotes

"Yes, Prince, you must be given credit, you're so good at exploiting your . . . hm, sickness (to put it decently); you managed to offer your friendship and money in such a clever form that it is now quite impossible for a noble man to accept them. It's either all too innocent, or all too clever . . . you, however, know which."

Related Characters: Vladimir Doktorenko (speaker), Prince Lev Nikolaevich Myshkin

Related Themes:

Page Number: 282

Explanation and Analysis

Burdovsky, Keller, Ippolit, and Doktorenko have tried to swindle Myshkin out of his inheritance by claiming that Burdovsky is actually the son of Myshkin's late benefactor, Pavlishchev. Myshkin treats them with kindness and offers Burdovsky 10,000 roubles, even though he also proves that Burdovsky's claim is false. Yet rather than accepting Myshkin's generosity and forgiveness, the young men grow angry. This is partly because they are embarrassed; they have been made to look foolish in front of all the guests in Myshkin's house, particularly because it is Myshkin who is usually taken to be the fool.

However, the other reason why the young men are angry is because they do not understand Myshkin's kind and forgiving attitude. In this quotation, Doktorenko expresses his belief that Myshkin is "exploiting" his illness in order to manipulate people. He thinks it's possible that this is "all too innocent," but also implies it may be an elaborate scheme. Because Doktorenko and his friends are cynical, manipulative, and selfish, he imagines that the same might be true of Myshkin. He evidently finds it difficult to fathom that Myshkin's kindness and vulnerability are just what they are appear. At the same time, this quotation is important because Doktorenko is actually one of the few characters who links Myshkin's innocence with his intelligence (or, to put it in Doktorenko's more suspicious words, his cleverness). Yet in believing that Myshkin must either be innocent *or* clever, Doktorenko misses the truth: that Myshkin has both of these qualities, as his innocence is a form of wisdom.

Part Two, Chapter Eleven Quotes

"Well, see how you throw a man into a final flummox! For pity's sake, Prince: first such simple-heartedness, such innocence as even the golden age never heard of, then suddenly at the same time you pierce a man through like an arrow with this deepest psychology of observation. But excuse me, Prince, this calls for an explanation, because I . . . I'm simply confounded! Naturally, in the final end my aim was to borrow money, but you asked me about money as if you don't find anything reprehensible in it, as if that's how it should be?"

Related Characters: Keller (speaker), Prince Lev Nikolaevich Myshkin

Related Themes:

Page Number: 309

Explanation and Analysis

A few days have passed since Myshkin's disastrous soiree. After a discussion with Ganya, Myshkin returns home, where Keller intrudes upon him and insists on telling Myshkin his whole life story. Feeling a little weary and annoyed, Myshkin stops him. In trying to get to the bottom of why he's actually there, he asks if Keller wants to borrow money. This quotation is Keller's astonished response. He cannot understand how Myshkin has such insight into the psychology of other people that he immediately knew Keller's ultimate purpose in visiting, which he had been trying to conceal with flattery and his supposed desire to tell his life's story.

It is notable that, in expressing his shock, Keller emphasizes that he can't understand how Myshkin's "innocence" and "simple-heartedness" coexists with his profound psychological insight, which Keller compares to piercing a man with an arrow. Indeed, this violent metaphor further emphasizes the contrasts between these two supposedly oppositional aspects of Myshkin's personality. Of course, what the novel ultimately shows is that Myshkin's innocence *provides* him with this insight. His Christlike love and empathy for all of humanity means that he sees people for exactly what they are. Ironically, this can leave people feeling exposed and even violated, perhaps because it causes them to question their own flawed morality.

Part Three, Chapter Five Quotes

He is either a doctor or indeed of an extraordinary intelligence and able to guess a great many things. (But that he is ultimately an "idiot" there can be no doubt at all.)

Related Characters: Ippolit Terentyev (speaker), Prince Lev Nikolaevich Myshkin

Related Themes:

Page Number: 389

Explanation and Analysis

At Myshkin's impromptu birthday party, Ippolit suddenly produces a sealed envelope from his pocket, an article that he's written, and announces that he's going to read it. Despite a lackluster reaction from the partygoers, who suggest that he wait until the next day, Ippolit dramatically embarks on reading the article, which is called "A Necessary Explanation." He describes a visit the day before with Myshkin, who somehow knew that Ippolit suffered from nightmares and suggested that they might be better in Pavlovsk. Stunned by Myshkin's insight, here Ippolit suggests that Myshkin has "extraordinary intelligence." Yet, strangely, he also says that Myshkin is definitely an idiot.

This contradictory statement reflects the way that most characters feel about Myshkin to some degree. Although they might not put it in such direct, harsh terms, the other characters all struggle to reconcile their sense that Myshkin is insightful with their certainty that he is also an "idiot." In Ippolit's case, he feels sure of Myshkin's idiocy because they have such differing philosophical outlooks on the world. Ippolit, along with several other young characters in the play, has fallen into nihilism as a result of the cynical disenchantment he feels with the world. Ippolit believes that intelligent people must naturally be nihilists, which stands in stark opposition to Myshkin's deeply Christian, even Christlike, way of being.

Part Three, Chapter Six Quotes

❝ Nature appears to the viewer of this painting in the shape of some enormous, implacable, and dumb beast, or, to put it more correctly, much more correctly, strange though it is—in the shape of some huge machine of the most modern construction, which has senselessly seized, crushed, and swallowed up, blankly and unfeelingly, a great and priceless being—such a being as by himself was worth the whole of nature and all its laws, the whole earth, which was perhaps created solely for the appearance of this being alone! The painting seems precisely to express this notion of a dark, insolent, and senselessly eternal power, to which everything is subjected, and it is conveyed to you involuntarily.

Related Characters: Ippolit Terentyev (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 408

Explanation and Analysis

During the recitation of his long "Necessary Explanation" article, Ippolit describes seeing the copy of Holbein's "The Dead Christ" painting that hangs in Rogozhin's house. After leaving the house he felt very ill and became delirious. Once the delirium passed, he remembered the painting, and in this quotation reflects on the thoughts that it inspired in him. He argues that Holbein's rendering of Jesus' body makes it difficult (or even impossible) to believe in Jesus' resurrection. Instead, the painting seems to indicate that the forces of nature are all-powerful and meaningless. Put another way, "The Dead Christ" illustrates the cold absurdity of the world. Of course, what Ippolit is arguing is that the painting supports a nihilist interpretation of reality. The painting, then, represents the underlying atheistic doubt inherent in the practice of Christian faith, a reality which contrasts with the unwavering devotion and Christlike persona that Myshkin displays throughout the novel.

Part Three, Chapter Eight Quotes

❝ "I want to be brave and not afraid of anything. I don't want to go to their balls, I want to be useful. I wanted to leave long ago. They've kept me bottled up for twenty years, and they all want to get me married. When I was fourteen I already thought of running away, though I was a fool. Now I have it all worked out and was waiting for you, to ask you all about life abroad."

Related Characters: Aglaya Ivanovna Epanchin (speaker), Prince Lev Nikolaevich Myshkin

Related Themes:

Page Number: 429

Explanation and Analysis

Aglaya slips Myshkin a note asking him to meet her in the park. Having witnessed Ippolit's long speech and failed suicide attempt, Myshkin has been awake all night and falls asleep on the park bench where he is supposed to meet Aglaya. Aglaya wakes him and says that she's asked to meet because she has been planning to run away from home and wants his assistance. In this quotation, she explains her

frustrations with her family and why she wants to leave. Aglaya's words are remarkable in part because they highlight how modern she is in compared to the traditional expectations placed upon her, as she is actively going against her family's wishes and seeking independence. Earlier in the novel, Mrs. Epanchin mentioned that her daughters are attracted to ideas about women's changing role in society. Here, we see proof that Aglaya is aligning herself with early feminist ideas.

In this sense, Aglaya is one of the novel's many rebels, a character who refuses to accept her assigned role within society's heavily hierarchical social structure. She rejects the superficial elite world of her parents ("I don't want to go to their balls"), instead hoping to achieve greater, more important things. At the same time, it is also clear from this quotation—and from the very idea of running away from home in the first place—that Aglaya is a little naïve. The grim reality is that there are almost no options awaiting a young woman who runs away from home at this time, and Aglaya seems to have not realized how difficult it would be for her to actually live independently.

Part Three, Chapter Ten Quotes

❝ How did *she* dare write to *her*, he asked, wandering alone in the evening (sometimes not even remembering himself where he was walking). How could she write *about that*, and how could such an insane dream have been born in her head?

Related Characters: Prince Lev Nikolaevich Myshkin, Aglaya Ivanovna Epanchin, Nastasya Filippovna Barashkov

Related Themes:

Page Number: 452

Explanation and Analysis

Aglaya tells Myshkin that Nastasya has been writing her letters claiming to be in love with her and urging her to marry Myshkin so they can both be happy. Aglaya, meanwhile, wants to run away from home and asks Myshkin for assistance in doing so. After his conversation with Aglaya Myshkin goes to sleep, dreams about Nastasya, and then her letters upon waking, which the narrator compares to a dream or nightmare. Nightmares are one of the most frequently occurring similes in *The Idiot*, and this quotation helps illustrate what "nightmare" means in this context.

Myshkin explicitly links the nightmare or "insane dream" of Nastasya's letters to the disruption of social norms that they entail. The italicization of "she," "her," and "about that" shows how distressed Myshkin is by this violation, as his emphasis on Nastasya and Aglaya in contrast with his innocent expectations of them conveys disbelief. It also illustrates Myshkin's own repression, as he can't even bring himself to use the women's names or specify what "that" means. Throughout the novel, people accuse Nastasya of being "insane" because she scandalously violates the norms and expectations of society around her. In this case, she has not done anything actually reprehensible or violent. Rather, she interferes in Myshkin and Aglaya's lives in a way that arguably exposes their true feelings for each other, and also breaches the social expectations placed on her as a woman by claiming to be in love with another woman.

❝ "You are innocent, and all your perfection is in your innocence. Oh, remember only that! What do you care about my passion for you? You are mine now, I shall be near you all my life . . . I shall die soon."

Related Characters: Nastasya Filippovna Barashkov (speaker), Aglaya Ivanovna Epanchin

Related Themes:

Page Number: 454

Explanation and Analysis

After dreaming about Nastasya, Myshkin reads the letters she wrote to Aglaya. He is horrified by their content, which includes repeated declarations of love for Aglaya, and Nastasya's hope that Aglaya and Myshkin get married. In this quotation, which is taken from one of the last letters, Nastasya elaborates on her love for Aglaya, and cryptically meditates on some of the novel's main themes. Her declaration that Aglaya is perfect because she is innocence confirms the strong connection between Aglaya and Myshkin, and might even suggest that Nastasya is actually writing *to* Myshkin, although she is technically addressing Aglaya. This declaration also shows that Nastasya is one of the few characters who grasps that total innocence like Myshkin's is a form of perfection, rather than a sign of foolishness.

This quotation also establishes an oppositional relationship between Aglaya and Nastasya, from Nastasya's perspective. Although Nastasya doesn't articulate it directly here, her discussions of Aglaya's innocence implicitly contrast with her own view of herself as corrupted. We know from earlier in the book that Nastasya refuses to believe Myshkin's assertion that she is innocent, and is instead convinced that

the abuse she endured at the hand of Totsky has ruined her. Indeed, her use of the word "passion" here connects her own possessive romantic passion to corruption and violence. Nastasya prophetically links passionate love to her imminent death, and implicitly contrasts this violent form of love with the innocent, perfect love practiced by Aglaya and Myshkin.

Part Four, Chapter One Quotes

❝ As soon as some of our young ladies cut their hair, put on blue spectacles, and called themselves nihilists, they became convinced at once that, having put on the spectacles, they immediately began to have their own "convictions."

Related Themes:

Page Number: 463

Explanation and Analysis

The beginning of Part Four opens with a brief note about the activities of Varya, before a long digression on the part of the narrator about the ways in which "ordinary people" are represented in works of literature. The narrator notes that even though most people are ordinary, most literary characters are extraordinary "types." Among ordinary people, there is a distinction between those who falsely believe they are special, and those who are "much cleverer." The quotation taken here contains one example of the former type.

Here, the narrator gives a direct, rather biting verdict on the nihilist movement. The fact that this quotation comes from a section in which the narrator is speaking on a meta level about literature and the decisions made by a novelist might lead the reader to determine that it represents the view of Dostoevsky himself. The narrator characterizes nihilism as a fad, and their mention of "blue spectacles" further emphasizes the idea that it is shallow and inauthentic, like a fashion trend. There is a palpable hint of misogyny in this quotation, as the narrator singles out young women in their mockery of nihilism. This is especially noticeable considering that all the nihilists actually depicted in the novel are young men. There is certainly an extent to which the narrator is ridiculing the idea of women having "convictions" in the first place. Indeed, nihilism's relationship to a burgeoning form of early feminism is perhaps part of why it receives such scorn in the novel.

Part Four, Chapter Seven Quotes

❝ "The pope seized land, an earthly throne, and took up the sword; since then everything has gone on that way, only to the sword they added lies, trickery, deceit, fanaticism, superstition, villainy; they played upon the most holy, truthful, simple-hearted, ardent feelings of the people; they traded everything, everything, for money, for base earthly power. Isn't that the teaching of the Antichrist?! How could atheism not come out of them? Atheism came out of them, out of Roman Catholicism itself! Atheism began, before all else, with them themselves: could they believe in themselves?"

Related Characters: Prince Lev Nikolaevich Myshkin (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 544

Explanation and Analysis

The Epanchins are hosting a gathering at their house, which is partly intended to serve as a way to introduce Myshkin to their high society friends. Both the Epanchins and Myshkin are been anxious about the possibility that Myshkin will make a fool out of himself during the event. At first everything goes smoothly and Myshkin stays quiet. However, when a guest named Ivan Petrovich mentions that Pavlishchev converted to Catholicism before he died, Myshkin is horrified and goes on a rant about Catholicism, which he calls an "unchristian" faith and characterizes as being worse than atheism. Here, Myshkin explains his justification for holding these views. He describes the Church as merely an extension of the Roman Empire, with all the evils that characterize empire: greed, propaganda, indoctrination, megalomania, and violence.

Myshkin then argues that because all these qualities are the opposite of Christianity—indeed, the are the "teaching[s]" of the devil—this makes Catholicism the cause of atheism. While Myshkin's speech here is provocative and rather melodramatic, the points he makes help illuminate the kind of Christianity he practices—one with absolute loyalty to the New Testament and Christ's teachings. As has been shown throughout the book, for Myshkin Christianity is about enacting a totally innocent, loving, and forgiving way of being in all of one's interactions. In fact, Myshkin's Christianity seems to have little to do with organized religion at all. In his view, this is the opposite of the Catholic Church, which is more an empire than a faith. He argues that Catholicism drains the faith out of religion, and that this absence of true belief paved the way for atheism.

"Well, it's no disaster! A man, too, comes to an end, and this was just a clay pot!"

Related Characters: Mrs. Lizaveta Prokofyevna Epanchin (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 549

Explanation and Analysis

Before the Epanchins' gathering, Aglaya sarcastically tells Myshkin that he should break the expensive Chinese vase that stands in the drawing room and is so precious to her mother. To Myshkin's horror, despite taking pains to avoid the vase, he forgets himself and knocks it over at the end of his impassioned speech about Catholicism. However, rather than crying (as Aglaya predicted) or being angry, Mrs. Epanchin laughs and assures Myshkin that the vase's destruction is no big deal. In this quotation she points out that it is ridiculous to get upset over the loss of material things when everything must end, including human lives.

These words show how much Mrs. Epanchin—who is known to greatly exaggerate minor problems—has grown over the course of the novel. Indeed, it is arguably her friendship with the Christlike Myshkin that has enabled her to be more forgiving and have a better sense of perspective on life. This is one of the few points in the novel in which another character actually comes around to Myshkin's tolerance and innocent demeanor, suggesting that what others mistake as foolishness is actually wisdom that can beneficial in coping with life's mishaps.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

PART ONE, CHAPTER ONE

It is November, and a train is pulling into St. Petersburg. In the third-class carriage, two rather similar-looking young men sit facing each other. One of them is 27 and has dark hair and a "mocking, and even malicious smile." The other is around the same age and is wearing a hooded cloak that is certainly not warm enough for a Russian winter day. The man in the clock is blond and looks a little sickly, but his face is "pleasant." He shivers and explains to his neighbor that he's coming from Switzerland and had forgotten how cold it gets at home in Russia.

The opening of the novel introduces two key characters who, even from the limited information provided, are clearly opposites. Where Rogozhin is dark-haired and somewhat sinister, Myshkin has lighter features and seems kind, if a little innocent or naïve. Importantly, this passage also establishes the binary between light and dark, which will play a central role in the novel.

The blond man happily answers the dark-haired man's questions, explaining that he has been away for more than four years receiving treatment for "some strange nervous illness" which causes fits. He is still not cured, and he can no receive treatment because the man who had been paying for it, Pavlishchev, recently died. The blond man tried writing to his "distant relation" in St. Petersburg, Mrs. Epanchin, but didn't get a response, and thus was forced to come back to Russia. He admits that he doesn't know where he's going to stay once he gets to the city, and that the small bundle he is carrying with him contains all his possessions.

This passage further confirms the sense that Myshkin is naïve, and also rather vulnerable. The combination of his epilepsy and his apparent poverty means that he must depend on the kindness of others to survive. There is certainly something naïve or overly trusting in the fact that Myshkin is coming to St. Petersburg with no money, or even a guarantee that anyone will receive him there.

The blonde man also says he is not surprised that he didn't receive a reply from the Epanchins, because they are so distantly related. A nearby clerk joins the conversation, someone the narrator describes as a "Mr. Know-it-all" who is always up to date on society gossip. Know-it-alls like him basically treat gossip as a profession. The blond man introduces himself to the clerk as Prince Lev Nikolaevich Myshkin, and the clerk responds that he has never even heard of this name. The prince explains he is the last in his line.

Myshkin comes from a noble family, which is why the "Mr. Know-it-all" clerk recognizes his name. Yet, at the same time, Myshkin has very little money or security. This was not a particularly uncommon occurrence in Russia at the time. Coming from a noble family, while often associated with wealth, does not guarantee that one has money.

The dark-haired man then introduces himself as Parfyon Rogozhin, and the clerk, astonished, asked if he's the descendant of the non-noble Rogozhin who recently died, leaving 2.5 million rubles. Rogozhin rudely replies that he is, and then furiously adds that neither his mother nor his brother told him about the money. He also explains that before he died, his father almost killed him. Rogozhin admits that his father possibly had the right to be angry with him. When his father died, the telegram containing the news was sent to his aunt, an old widow who "sits with the holy fools" all day. The aunt took the telegram to a police station because she was too scared to open it.

Again, it becomes clearer that Rogozhin and Myshkin are opposites. Whereas Myshkin is noble, poor, innocent, and naïve, Rogozhin is non-noble, rich, and seemingly mired in violence and corruption. The reader can already intuit that Rogozhin is a rather cold person, who fixates on his incoming fortune with seemingly little care about the poor relationship he has with his family.

Rogozhin mentions Nastasya Filippovna, and the clerk exclaims that he knows her. He explains that she is a noblewoman who only associates with one man, a noble "landowner and big capitalist" called Afanasy Ivanovich Totsky, who is himself friends with General Epanchin. The clerk, who mentions that his name is Lebedev, proudly says that he "knows everything." For a moment Rogozhin thinks that Lebedev is implying Nastasya Filippovna is engaged, and panics. However, Lebedev assures him that she remains unattached and no one knows anything about her.

As this passage shows, the social world depicted in the novel is fast-paced, and having the latest information about what is going on is very important to the characters. This is why Lebedev is proud of being a "know-it-all," and why Rogozhin panics at the thought that Nastasya might be engaged without him knowing. Of course, it also seems clear that Rogozhin himself is interested in Nastasya.

Rogozhin wearily explains that this is always the problem with Nastasya. She has been living with Totsky, but now Totsky is 55 and planning to marry the most beautiful woman in St. Petersburg, so wants "to get rid of her." Rogozhin explains that he bought diamond earrings for Nastasya with money his father had given him to pay off a debt on his behalf. His father went to Nastasya and pleaded to have the earrings back, and she threw the box at him. Rogozhin promptly took a train to Pskov, where he got so drunk that he passed out and spent the night unconscious on the street.

Here, it becomes inescapably clear that Rogozhin is a passionate, corrupt, and irresponsible person with questionable morals. He is evidently in love with Nastasya, but rather than pragmatically setting himself up to marry her, he commits rash acts (such as effectively stealing money from his father to buy her gifts) and then gets blackout drunk when things don't go to plan. This foreshadows the instability of morality and behavior that Rogozhin will go on to demonstrate throughout the novel.

As the train pulls into the station, Rogozhin confesses that although he doesn't know why, he "loves" Myshkin, and says he hopes that Myshkin will come and see him. He promises to buy the prince fancy clothes and "stuff your pockets with money," at which point they'll go to see Nastasya Filippovna together. Myshkin tells Rogozhin that he likes him too, "despite [his] gloomy face," and that he is grateful for the offer of clothes, which he desperately needs.

Rogozhin has been won over by Myshkin, but the way he chooses to express this love and admiration is rather suspicious. He seems to only be able to connect with others through ostentatious displays of his own wealth. As a result, he tries to endear himself to Myshkin by offering to buy him things.

PART ONE, CHAPTER TWO

General Epanchin lives in a grand house in St. Petersburg, and owns several other properties and a factory. He is known as someone "with big money, big doings, and big connections." He is intelligent but received little education, and was the son of a "common soldier." He has many good qualities, and despite some recent misfortune remains upbeat. He has a fondness for gambling that he doesn't try to hide. He is 56, which is thought to be "the prime of life." The general is healthy, with a "flourishing family."

From this introduction of General Epanchin, it is clear that he is something of a model citizen, someone to be admired and envied. Importantly, his successful life also points to the significance of (newfound) social mobility. General Epanchin is not noble, was born into a humble family, and received little education. His rise in circumstances reflects social shifts in Russia during this time.

Mrs. Epanchin is from the princely Myshkin family, a very old but somewhat minor line of Russian nobility. She and her husband have three daughters: Alexandra (age 25), Adelaida (age 23), and Aglaya (age 20). Although they are only noble through their mother, they are very rich and beautiful. They are all charming, intelligent, and talented; they are very close to one another and rather modest in character.

It is important to note that the Russian word that is here translated as "princely" does not actually correspond to royal status, but rather a lower rank of nobility. As the narrator shows here, the age of one's family is important, but does not necessarily correspond directly to rank.

When Myshkin arrives at Epanchins' house, a servant shows him into an anteroom where he is greeted by the general's "special attendant." The attendant tells him to leave his bundle and wait in the reception room, but Myshkin says he would rather stay in the anteroom. The attendant objects that this is not proper, as Myshkin is a guest. This raises suspicion that Myshkin might not be who he says he is. Myshkin explains that he is related to Mrs. Epanchin, and that the two of them are the last two Myshkins. He says it is possible that the Epanchins will not receive him, as he and Mrs. Epanchin are only very distantly related, but that he expects they will.

This moment introduces the importance of social etiquette in the world of the novel. Because of his position in society (i.e. a minor nobleman and guest of the prominent Epanchin family), Myshkin is expected to behave in a certain way. Indeed, this includes the expectation that Myshkin would be haughtily dissatisfied with waiting in the anteroom. Myshkin's violation of this expectation is so unusual and shocking that it makes the attendant question his identity.

The valet remains disturbed that Myshkin is sharing details of his life as if they were equals; he believes that Myshkin must either be a "moocher" or a "fool." Concluding that Myshkin must be a fool, the valet somehow likes him anyway, although he is also determined to stop talking to him because it is not proper. Yet the prince keeps talking, explaining that he is unused to how things are in Russia because he has been away for so long. The conversation is so "polite and courteous" that the valet cannot help but engage.

The valet's mixed feelings about Myshkin establish a trend that will be repeated throughout the novel. People tend to be intrigued, fascinated, and charmed by Myshkin. Yet although they might want to stay in conversation with him, they also know that his way of being clashes with the norms and expectations of society, and thus feel conflicted or guilty.

Myshkin explains that he has not spent much time in St. Petersburg until now. He mentions the fact that in Russia there is no capital punishment and tells the valet about witnessing an execution by guillotine. Myshkin observes that while the death itself is immediate, the leadup to it is harrowing. Yet even if they are horrified by it, people still watch. Myshkin hints that capital punishment is a violation of the Christian maxim not to kill. He observes that it is hypocritical to punish a murderer by killing him, and that he has had five nightmares about the execution since he saw it a month ago.

Capital punishment is a highly important issue in The Idiot. *At the time Dostoevsky wrote the novel, capital punishment had just been abolished in Russia as part of a series of reforms by Tsar Alexander II. As Myshkin argues here, humans seem to have a natural fascination with violence, even if they also abhor it. This paradox—and the struggles it creates—becomes a significant theme in the novel.*

The valet comments that it's good the guillotine is a swift and painless way to die, but Myshkin replies that the suffering of knowing for certain that one is about to die is far worse than the pain of a violent death. He believes it would be better to be violently killed by robbers than to be executed by the state, because at least in the former case you can retain hope to the last minute that you will be saved.

Unlike some Christians, Myshkin does not have a peaceful relationship with the idea of dying. Rather than accepting death as an inevitability or even embracing it as a chance to be closer to God in the afterlife, Myshkin feels horror when he thinks about death.

Another man comes into the anteroom; it is Gavrila Ardalionovich (known as Ganya), an extremely handsome 28-year-old. The valet introduces Myshkin to Ganya, doing so half in a whisper so Myshkin can't hear what he is saying. Ganya says that Mrs. Epanchin received Myshkin's letter and that General Epanchin will be happy to see him. He objects to the fact that Myshkin has been waiting in the anteroom rather than the reception room, but before the prince can explain the general calls out, inviting him in.

The final moments of this chapter further emphasize the importance of social etiquette in the world of the novel. Like the valet, Ganya cannot believe that Myshkin would be happy to wait in the anteroom, even though there does not seem to be anything actually wrong with it. Indeed, the etiquette depicted thus far seems somewhat shallow and even pointless.

PART ONE, CHAPTER THREE

Myshkin tells General Epanchin that he doesn't have any specific business to discuss; rather, he has just come from Switzerland and wanted to meet. The general suspiciously responds that Myshkin must have an actual reason for being there, but Myshkin replies that he doesn't. In response to further questions, Myshkin admits that he doesn't know where he is staying yet, and that his little bundle contains all his possessions. General Epanchin appears to dismiss him, and the prince amiably gets up to go. However, at this point the general stops him, saying that he would actually like to get to know the prince after all.

Again, the reader sees evidence of conflicted feelings in General Epanchin's reaction to Myshkin. On one hand the general is suspicious and can't seem to believe that Myshkin would come to meet him without a self-interested intention. Yet is actually true that Myshkin came with such an innocent aim. When General Epanchin realizes this, his attitude shifts, and he becomes more curious about him.

General Epanchin is surprised to learn that Myshkin is 26 and not younger, and Myshkin replies that many people say he has a "youthful face." He says that he is worried he is annoying the general. He admits that he has no property, career, or money of his own, and that he would like to do some work, although he is limited by his illness and his lack of any skill.

In some ways Myshkin does not actually resemble a real person, and certainly not an adult. His illness has removed him from society in such a way that he takes on a mystical, fairy tale-like quality—apt for a character who is framed as a Christ figure.

Myshkin proceeds to explain his life story to General Epanchin. Orphaned as a child, his illness meant that he had to be raised in the countryside rather than the city. The late Pavlishchev supported him, likely because he had been a friend of Myshkin's father. Myshkin admits that "the frequent attacks of illness had made almost an idiot of him." About five years ago Pavlishchev sent him to the Swiss clinic of Professor Schneider, who conducts research into illnesses like Myshkin's. After Pavlishchev suddenly died, Schneider kept treating Myshkin for another two years without receiving payment. However, Myshkin eventually decided he needed to return to Russia.

Myshkin's description of his life story illustrates the extent to which his life has never been under his own control. Of course, to some degree this is true of everyone, but because of his orphan status and his illness, Myshkin has had to be especially reliant on other people to take care of him. This is yet another way in which he can appear to be childlike to others, prompting them to underestimate him.

General Epanchin checks that Myshkin has received some education and that he can read and write without errors; Myshkin assures him that he can. The general asks Ganya to give Myshkin a pen and paper. Ganya is holding a photo of Nastasya Filippovna, which Nastasya gave him herself when he came to see her on her 25th birthday. The general informs Ganya that Nastasya intends to give her "final word" that very night during the party at her place. Ganya goes white. General Epanchin asks about Ganya's family; he replies that he has stopped speaking to his father, who he claims is a "fool." His mother and sister are upset, seemingly because they don't want him to marry Nastasya. This has something to do with her relationship to Totsky.

In contrast to the childlike Myshkin, whose life has a simple, fairy tale-like quality, Ganya appears to be overwhelmed by a complex web of problems. The issues he encounters regarding his possible engagement to Nastasya serve as a reminder that in the word of the novel, marriages are as much about abiding by familial wishes as they are about romance (in fact, perhaps much more so).

Prince Myshkin, meanwhile, looks at the photo of Nastasya and remarks on her beauty. Based on the photo, she has dark blond hair, dark eyes, and a thin face. He comments that even though he has only been in Russia for one day, he has already heard about her before. Ganya asks if Myshkin thinks Rogozhin is "a serious man or just a mischief maker." Myshkin diplomatically replies that Rogozhin has "a lot of passion [...] some sort of sick passion." General Epanchin observes that Ganya seems almost pleased to hear about Rogozhin's attachment to Nastasya, as if this is a means of escape for himself. The general reminds Ganya that no one is forcing him to do anything. Ganya promises that he is "willing."

The idea of passion, and in particular a dark, disturbing form of passion, is very significant in the novel. It is associated with Rogozhin perhaps more than any other character. Even though Myshkin and Rogozhin have only met once, Myshkin recognizes this trait in him immediately. Indeed, there is an important contrast between the innocent love characterized by Myshkin and the "sick passion" he describes Rogozhin as possessing.

General Epanchin exclaims that the sentence Prince Myshkin has written on the paper he's been given is a "model" example of calligraphy. The prince gives a long, enthusiastic response about calligraphy, revealing his expert knowledge, and the general comments that "there's a career here." He promises to find Myshkin a position in the chancellery, and suggests that he should stay in Ganya's family home. He thinks it will be good for Myshkin to find his feet in St. Petersburg while staying with a respectable family, and will recommend Myshkin to them himself. He also gives Myshkin 25 roubles to start off, saying he has a long-term "intention" for their friendship that will be revealed in due time.

Myshkin's friendly open-heartedness, while sometimes initially greeted with suspicion and even hostility, often yields kindness and generosity in return. When General Epanchin initially thought that Myshkin was here to get something out of him, he didn't want to give it, and indeed dismissed Myshkin from his house altogether. However, now that Epanchin sees what an unselfish person Myshkin is, he is happy to provide a great many things for him.

Ganya confirms that Myshkin would be welcome with his family. General Epanchin expresses dislike of their other lodger, Ferdyshchenko, who jokingly pretends to be related to Nastasya. The general then announces that has he has to leave immediately, but promises to tell Mrs. Epanchin about Myshkin. Once the general goes, Myshkin notices Ganya staring at the portrait of Nastasya, and observes that while Nastasya is extraordinarily beautiful, it is clear that she has suffered terribly. Myshkin comments that he can't marry anyone because he's sick, but that Rogozhin would probably marry Nastasya instantly if he could, and stab her "a week later."

It is not clear whether Myshkin is physically incapable of marrying anyone due to his illness, or whether he simply believes that his condition makes him an undesirable partner. Of course, the fact that he can't work and has no other source of income does indeed make it less likely that he will be considered a good match as a husband. In a sense, his stated inability to marry and his lack of romantic "passion" (in contrast to Rogozhin) make him a somewhat asexual figure, again similar to Christ.

PART ONE, CHAPTER FOUR

The Epanchin sisters are strong and healthy, with big appetites. Their mother, Mrs. Lizaveta Prokofyevna Epanchin, also likes to eat a lot. This morning, when General Epanchin comes to kiss his wife and daughters good morning, he notices that there is something "peculiar" about their faces. The general is a sensitive and tactful father, and has avoided rushing his daughter's marriages. Every year the Epanchin family becomes wealthier and more respected, and thus it is advantageous that the daughters have thus far been waiting to get married.

Again, this passage emphasizes that the role of marriage has far less to do with love than it has to do with pragmatic economic and social arrangements. It also contains a useful reminder that the fortunes of an individual or family can rise and fall rather quickly. This illustrates an increase in social mobility during the novel's contemporary time period.

Totsky, a remarkably wealthy and high-ranking 55-year-old who is friends with General Epanchin, wants to marry the eldest Epanchin sister, Alexandra, who is 25. Aglaya is acknowledged to be the most beautiful of her sisters, and Alexandra and Adelaida have agreed to ensure that she has the best match possible, even if this means making sacrifices themselves. The marriage between Totsky and Alexandra makes perfect sense, but it is nonetheless coming about quite slowly. This is because there is a problem stopping the union from taking place.

Alexandra and Adelaida's decision to possibly make sacrifices if it means ensuring a better match for Aglaya is not an of pure selflessness. A highly advantageous marriage for Aglaya would benefit all the Epanchins, not just Aglaya specifically. Indeed, it would raise the profile of the Epanchins and could provide them with a more luxurious, elite lifestyle.

The problem began 18 years ago, with a very high-ranking but very impoverished nobleman named Filipp Alexandrovich Barashkov. Barashkov suffered a series of misfortunes that culminated in his estate burning down and his wife dying in the fire; he went crazy with grief and died one month later. Barashkov's two very young daughters were placed in the care of Totsky but one soon died of whooping cough, which left only one, Nastasya. At first Nastasya was raised along with the children of Totsky's steward, but at 12 years old Totsky realized how remarkably beautiful, charming, and intelligent she was, and he arranged for a much higher quality of education and upbringing for her.

There is a distinct similarity between Nastasya and Myshkin's childhoods. Both were orphaned at a young age, and were forced to rely on the generosity of someone who was not a family member. At first Totsky appears to be just as altruistic and noble as Pavlishchev. However, as will soon become clear, his motivations for providing a special education for Nastasya were in fact more sinister.

When Nastasya was 16, Totsky moved her into a wooden house in a little village called "Delight" along with a housekeeper and a maid. Totsky himself would come to visit her there, staying for months at a time. Four years later, Nastasya heard that Totsky was about to marry a society beauty, and suddenly went to St. Petersburg by herself to confront him. She told Totsky that she was going to obstruct his marriage because she wanted to spite him and to laugh at him. Totsky is the kind of man obsessed with preserving his own interests and comforts, and he was alarmed by Nastasya's determination to destroy him.

Because of the social norms of the time, what Totsky did to Nastasya is not spelled out explicitly. However, it can be inferred that he sexually abused her from the way he deliberately isolated her and visited her for months, with no logical reason for being there. This could be framed as Totsky making Nastasya his mistress or concubine of sorts. Yet considering the inherent power imbalance between the two, given that she is only 16 and he is her guardian, it would also make sense to call it rape.

Nastasya did not have the power to take Totsky down by legal means, or even cause too serious of a scandal. However, she was also totally reckless because she doesn't value anything, "least of all herself." This makes her far braver than Totsky. In recent years, she has become even more bewitchingly beautiful; there is a sort of magic in her dark eyes. Totsky eventually decided to set Nastasya up in St. Petersburg in "luxurious comfort" and to arrange an excellent marriage for her. This was five years ago. Totsky remains afraid of Nastasya, who during this time has "gained the upper hand terribly much." She lives modestly and has few friends. Her social circle includes several minor and ridiculous people, including the "salacious buffoon" named Ferdyshchenko.

Nastasya's relationship with Totsky provides an example of how a person with no structural power can nonetheless manage to control others around her. Part of what allows Nastasya to successfully gain a degree of control over Totsky is the fact that she is fearless—not just of Totsky, but of social norms in general. This is revealed to be true through her continued scandalous behavior and the odd mix of people with whom she surrounds herself.

Nonetheless, Nastasya and her extraordinary beauty have become quite famous. Totsky admits that he will not know peace until Nastasya is married, and tells General Epanchin that he has found the perfect suitor: Ganya, who has apparently been passionately in love with Nastasya for years. Speaking with Nastasya and General Epanchin, Totsky offers to provide Nastasya with a dowry of 75,000 roubles. With a surprising warmth, Nastasya remarks that she is surprised Totsky is still frightened by her. She then turns to the general and tells him she has heard many great things about his daughters, that she has "a profound and sincere respect for them," and that she is thrilled that she might help them in some way.

Again, Nastasya could be described as having no real power because she is a woman (and, worse, a woman who has likely had sex before marriage), an orphan, and someone with no money of her own. However, she acts as if she has power, including when she tells General Epanchin that she hopes she might be able to help him and his family. In a sense, by behaving as if she is powerful, Nastasya actually becomes so.

Nastasya comments that there is much to admire about Ganya, and that she might come to love him. However, she refuses to be "rushed" in her decision. She accepts the dowry, which she maintains is not "payment for her maidenly dishonor," but rather reparations for her misfortune. However, Totsky is deeply troubled by his belief that Nastasya knows that Ganya is actually only marrying her for money. The rumor is that Ganya hates her and plans to seek revenge against her after they marry. Meanwhile, another rumor is circulating that Totsky himself is passionately in love with Nastasya. Everyone knows that he gave her an enormously expensive pearl necklace for her birthday. General Epanchin is desperate to avoid going to Nastasya's party, and has decided Myshkin is the perfect excuse.

The scheming, scandal, and corruption that surround Nastasya are considered improper and abhorrent within the highly restrictive, formal world of Russian high society. It is likely for this reason that General Epanchin wants to avoid the party altogether. Indeed, Nastasya's fearless embrace of scandal is another way in which she gains power in the world. Whereas the much more powerful men around her skitter about trying to avoid any hint of disgrace, she insists on doing things her own way, rebelling against the male-dominated hierarchy attempting to marry her off and control her fate.

PART ONE, CHAPTER FIVE

General Epanchin knows that Mrs. Epanchin will be shocked when she hears that her only living relative is basically a pauper relying on the charity of others. Yet the general also tells her that Myshkin is "a perfect child," who is pitiful due to his illness and poverty. After some initial uncertainty, Lizaveta agrees to receive Myshkin for lunch, although she seems worried about how he will behave. The general assures her that Myshkin has wonderful manners even if he is "a bit too simple at times." Having quickly introduced Myshkin to his family, telling them about the calligraphy he did, General Epanchin rushes off.

Although there are several ways in which Myshkin does resemble a child, the patronizing attitude with which others treat him arguably says more about them than it does about Myshkin himself. People like the Epanchins struggle to understand someone who does not conform to the expectations and norms of the elite world in which they inhabit. As a result, they dismiss Myshkin as pathetic, even as they are also generous with him.

Mrs. Epanchin sits Myshkin opposite her and asks if he needs a napkin tied around his neck; he assures he just lays one in his lap. On Mrs. Epanchin's request, Myshkin tells the women all about his life story. He knows the family history very well, but cannot figure out his relation to Lizaveta. She is thrilled by the conversation and encourages them all to go into the gathering room. She sits Myshkin by the fire and requests that he tell them something. The prince tells them about arriving in Switzerland and feeling terribly sad. He talks about seeing an ass and developing a fondness for the animal, and the sisters make jokes and giggle. Lizaveta apologizes, but Myshkin replies that they've done nothing wrong and laughs as well.

As this scene shows, at times Myshkin serves as a figure of entertainment to the other characters. They cannot understand him, but find him strange, amusing, and charming. At the same time, it is also clear that despite all the interest and attention they give him, they don't quite take him seriously.

They then discuss kindness, and Mrs. Epanchin admits that she sometimes her feels kindness is a flaw, because she is kind even when she feels angry. However, she also insists that she's "not as stupid as I seem." She asks to hear more about Switzerland, and Myshkin explains that he found the natural landscape very beautiful, but that he also always feels "uneasy" in front of nature. He says that his health improved while he was in Switzerland, and that he was happy for almost his whole time there, treasuring every day. He spent a lot of time thinking about how to live, and came to the conclusion that even in prison, one could have an "immense," meaningful life.

There is an obvious resemblance to this conversation between Myshkin and the Epanchin women and Jesus talking to his disciples. Although on the surface Myshkin is speaking simply about his own experiences, his words contain profound moral significance. Indeed, his story reflects Christian teachings about respect for nature, finding meaning in suffering, and achieving happiness without material possessions.

Aglaya comments that Myshkin is similar to Evlampia Nikolavna, an official's wife who renounces material goods and lives as minimally as possible. Myshkin qualifies that life in prison can be horribly difficult, but that every life is valuable. He then tells a story of a man he met who was condemned to be executed and was even led to the scaffold before a firing squad. It took 20 minutes for the man's sentence to be read aloud, during which time the man was absolutely convinced that he was going to die. As the man was dressed and led toward the exact position where he was to be killed, he knew he only had five minutes to live, but to him these five minutes felt eternally long and precious.

The story Myshkin tells here is something that happened to Dostoevsky himself. Sentenced to death for engagement in subversive political activities, Dostoevsky and several other men were taken to the scaffold to be shot by a firing squad. At the final moment, it was announced that their sentence had been commuted by the Tsar. Convinced he was about to die and that nothing could save him, Dostoevsky got another chance at life.

The man, who was only 27, said goodbye to his comrades, and then was faced with two minutes in solitude, forced to contemplate his impending death. These minutes were so torturous that he eventually came to hope that the firing squad would just hurry up and kill him already. Myshkin seems to conclude his story, leaving the Epanchin women confused. He then explains that although the man survived, he did not manage to keep living as if every minute was the most precious thing in the world. It is hard to sustain such a "reckoning." Myshkin thinks that there might be a way to live more "intelligently" than most people, and Aglaya comments that Myshkin may have found it, considering he just said he was happy throughout his time in Switzerland.

Unlike a religious parable, Myshkin's story does not have a tidy ending. The man whose life was saved may temporarily have had a greater insight into the world, but Myshkin wisely observes that such realizations are difficult to actually remember and sustain over a longer period of time. Indeed, this is a rather universal flaw in human nature, and can be used to explain why people do not have as much moral wisdom as they perhaps ought to.

Myshkin goes on to explain that he has personally witnessed an execution. He admits that he found it sickening, but that he also "couldn't tear [his] eyes away." He says that he already told the story earlier to the valet, and when Mrs. Epanchin comments that this is strange, Aglaya replies that Myshkin is a "democrat." Myshkin is interested in the idea of portraying the face of a man who will imminently face the guillotine, reflecting that he saw a similar portrait recently in Basel. He says that when he witnessed the execution, he caught the eye of the condemned man and immediately "understood everything." However, he can't imagine how one would represent such an expression in a painting.

It is significant that Aglaya seems to understand Myshkin's willingness to talk to the valet better than her parents. This suggests that there may be a generational divide when it comes to egalitarian social ideas. At the same time, Ganya was just as baffled by Myshkin's "democratic" behavior as the older Epanchins. This indicates that Aglaya is actually unusual and perhaps rebellious in her embrace of egalitarian ideas.

Thinking aloud, Myshkin imagines the exact details of the period leading up to an execution, including the final meal and drive to the scaffold. He imagines obsessing over how many minutes one has left to live and watching people who are allowed to keep living the rest of their lives. He imagines the man crying on the scaffold, being given the cross to kiss, and craving just a few final moments of peace. Then the sound of the guillotine, at which point the condemned man "*knows everything*." Aglaya insists that Myshkin now tells them about when he was in love, but he explains that he wasn't, just "happy in a different way."

Again, the extent to which Myshkin is horrified by death is somewhat surprising for a Christian, as the religion focuses heavily on the afterlife. On the other hand, perhaps his long reflections on the experience of being executed are actually a form of spiritual contemplation. After all, Jesus himself was condemned to death and executed.

PART ONE, CHAPTER SIX

Myshkin tells the Epanchin women that throughout his time in Switzerland, he taught children. He angered the adults in the community by refusing to keep certain things secret from the children, which emerged from his belief that children should be allowed to know everything. The children once saw Myshkin kiss a very poor woman named Marie, who he describes as terribly pitiful. Marie cared for her sick, elderly mother, but everyone in the community was cruel to her, laughing at her and abusing her. Marie was sick with tuberculosis, and by a certain point was too ashamed of her ragged, sickly appearance to be seen in town. When Marie's mother died, the local pastor publicly blamed Marie for the death.

There are more obvious Biblical allusions within this passage. Particularly on account of her name, Marie could represent Mary Magdalene, one of Jesus' followers. Marie's illness could also represent the people with leprosy who Jesus miraculously cured. Whereas Marie is ostracized and denigrated by the rest of the community, Myshkin is kind to her and touches her, which causes a great scandal. This is similar to the way that Jesus embraced and touched those who were ostracized.

Myshkin wanted to help Marie, and thus sold a diamond pin he owned and gave Marie the eight francs it was worth. He kissed her then, but explains that it was not because he was in love with her, but rather because he felt empathy for her. The children, who had been spying on them, clapped and laughed, and before long everyone in town knew about it. The children started teasing Marie brutally and thus Myshkin intervened, explaining that Marie was very unfortunate. As a result, some of the children were kinder. Yet their parents were angry that Myshkin had been talking to the children as if they were adults. They forbade the children from speaking to Marie, but they still snuck out to see her, giving her presents and telling her they loved her.

Myshkin's special connection to children further emphasizes his similarity to Jesus. In the Bible, Jesus famously says that the Kingdom of God "belongs" to little children. At the same time, Myshkin's story does not portray children as perfectly pure beings. As their treatment of Marie shows, they can be exclusionary and cruel. Yet the story also shows that children have a fundamental goodness and moral instinct that survives even the oppressive and corrupting actions of adults.

Somehow, the children managed to buy Marie a whole outfit. She got sicker and sicker, and it became clear that she was dying. Despite her weakness, whenever the children came to visit her she would become overjoyed. Myshkin explains that thanks to the children, Marie "died almost happy." At her funeral, the children covered her coffin with flowers, and each year they lie fresh flowers on her grave. After the funeral the pastor and schoolteacher banned the children from seeing Myshkin, but the children managed to send him notes anyway, and they became even closer in the face of the ban. Before Myshkin left, Schneider stated that he believed Myshkin was essentially a child himself.

The reaction of the adults to Myshkin's connection with the children deserves particular attention. Although Myshkin's impact on the children is obviously positive and loving, the adults in the community are highly suspicious of it. This is perhaps because Myshkin inspires the children to rebel against their parents and the schoolteacher (even though this rebellion takes the form of generosity and kindness). This is not the first time in which Myshkin will be framed as a disruptor of existing social hierarchies.

Myshkin calls the children his "comrades," and says that they always made him happy. He was devoted to them and thought that he would stay in the village forever and never return to Russia. Now that he is returning, he wonders if people in his homeland will view him as a child and an "idiot," as many did in Switzerland. When the children found out he was leaving, they wrote him sad letters, and they came to wave him goodbye at the train station.

Part of what drew Myshkin to the children is the fact that they did not judge or exclude him for being an "idiot," but felt that he was one of them. Myshkin does not appear to be ashamed of being likened to a child, but is nervous about whether people back home in Russia will still perceive him as an idiot, highlighting a difference between the two.

Suddenly, Myshkin switches to describing the face of each Epanchin woman. He notes that Adelaida has a "happy" and "kind" face. Alexandra's face is beautiful, but perhaps contains secret sadness. Her face reminds him of Holbein's Dresden Madonna. Finally, he observes that Mrs. Epanchin's face shows that she is "a perfect child… despite your age." He says that he hopes they don't mind him making such observations, and that he has a special purpose for them.

In another context, describing the faces of people you have just met might be seen as a strangely direct or even rude thing to do. However, the Epanchin women clearly recognize that Myshkin has a certain kind of wisdom, even if he also has aspects of foolishness. As a result, they do not balk at his descriptions.

PART ONE, CHAPTER SEVEN

Mrs. Epanchin agrees with Myshkin's remark that she is a child. She observes that Myshkin might be smarter than all three of her daughters put together. Myshkin now turns to Aglaya and says that she is so extraordinarily beautiful that no one is afraid of her. Because "beauty is a riddle," Myshkin is not sure of her other characteristics yet. He compares her beauty to that of Nastasya, and all the women immediately cry out in surprise, asking where Myshkin has seen Nastasya and demanding that he show them her portrait. Myshkin leaves to get it, and the Epanchin daughters express their interest in him, while adding that he is "much too simple" to the point of being "slightly ridiculous."

Already the novel has shown that there are multiple types of beauty. Of course, there is the distinction between internal and external beauty—yet even considering external beauty alone, Myshkin has highlighted key variations. Whereas he describes Aglaya as being so beautiful that no one can fear her, previously he noted that Nastasya's beauty contains its own frightening power. This links the characters of Aglaya and Nastasya, but also places them in opposition with one another.

When Myshkin returns to Ganya's office and tells him about his conversation with the Epanchin women, Ganya is furious and calls Myshkin an idiot under his breath. He then explains that the women are angry with him at the moment, and asks the prince to deliver a note to Aglaya from him without anyone seeing. Having written the note, he mutters to himself: "One word from her… and I really may break it off!" Myshkin carries the portrait and note back to the gathering room, and one the way finds him captivated by the image of Nastasya. He is so entranced by her beauty that he kisses the portrait.

The details of Ganya's dilemma now become indisputably clear. Part of him wants to marry Nastasya for the money, even though he hates her and faces opposition from his family regarding this possibility. Another part of him is understandably resistant to this plan, and part of the reason why is apparently that he loves Aglaya and wants to marry her instead.

Myshkin finds Aglaya alone in the doorway to the dining room and gives her Ganya's note. After, all four Epanchin women survey the portrait. Adelaida comments that Nastasya's beauty is powerful, observing: "You can overturn the world with such beauty." Mrs. Epanchin suddenly seems troubled, and recites the old saying that "a fool with a heart and no brains is as unhappy a fool as a fool with brains and no heart." She expresses concern about upcoming marriages. At this point Ganya enters, and Lizaveta asks him if he will soon be getting married. Ganya stammers that he isn't. Mrs. Epanchin then declares that she needs to get dressed, and bids farewell to Ganya and Myshkin.

Notice that Ganya has given two different answers to the question of whether he will marry Nastasya to Mrs. Epanchin and her husband. While earlier he assured General Epanchin that he is "willing" to marry Nastasya, here he denies that this plan is taking place. As this contradiction shows, Ganya is both experiencing personal turmoil and is also a somewhat duplicitous person.

While they are leaving, Ganya furiously accuses Myshkin of telling the Epanchin women he was getting married, and calls Myshkin "a shameless blabber." Aglaya returns to the room, at first not even noticing that Ganya is there. Ganya tells her: "Only one word from you—and I'm saved." Aglaya ignores him and tells Myshkin to write "I don't negotiate" on a piece of paper, along with today's date. She then takes Myshkin to another room and gives him Ganya's note to read. It is an anguished and melodramatic promise that if Aglaya wants him, he will abandon his "current situation" and resign himself to "poverty."

Here the parallel between Aglaya and Nastasya becomes more prominent. Aside from their connection through having Ganya as a possible suitor, the women are connected by the way that they assert power. In the face of a society that tells them they should be submissive and make decisions according to what is best for their families, both Aglaya and Nastasya insist on foregrounding their own agency when it comes to deciding who to marry.

Aglaya comments that the note is clumsily written, that Ganya has a "dirty" soul and that he once mistook Aglaya's pity for love. Ever since, he has been trying to "trap" her. She asks Myshkin to give Ganya's note back to him, but warns him that Ganya will not forgive him for it. She squeezes the prince's hand and leaves. When Myshkin returns to Ganya, he is indeed furious about being given the note back and is even more angry to hear that Aglaya let Myshkin read it. Myshkin recites exactly what Aglaya told him about Ganya trying to trap her. Ganya goes white, and furiously asks how Myshkin has managed to become Aglaya's confidant after only knowing her for two hours.

Clearly, Myshkin becoming Aglaya's "confidant" has nothing to do with any scheming on his part, and is instead the result of the natural affinity and affection the Epanchin women have instantly developed for him. At the same time, there is something amusingly incoherent about Myshkin's involvement in the complex, petty, and shallow social dynamics in which he is now embroiled, because they are so far from his way of being.

Myshkin tells Ganya everything that has happened in the two hours since he first met the Epanchin women. Ganya grows increasingly irate and keeps calling Myshkin an idiot under his breath, until Myshkin final tells him that he is not actually an idiot and doesn't like being spoken to in this way. He suggests that it might be better if he didn't stay at Ganya's house after all. At this point, Ganya suddenly becomes very upset and begs the prince for forgiveness. Myshkin forgives him immediately and agrees to stay with him after all. By now, they are standing outside Ganya's apartment.

Ganya is clearly a petty, selfish, and somewhat cruel person, but his fear over hurting Myshkin illustrates that he is not all bad. Indeed, this turnaround, combined with Myshkin's willingness to forgive him, illustrate the fundamental goodness that exists within every person, even if it is buried under layers of corrupt and immoral behavior.

PART ONE, CHAPTER EIGHT

The fact that Ganya's family keep tenants is deeply embarrassing to him, as it contrasts with the image of himself and his circumstances that he wishes to project to the world. Along with the tenants, the apartment is shared by Ganya's father, General Ivolgin, his 13-year-old brother Kolya, his mother Nina Alexandrovna, and his sister Varvara Ardalionovna (Varya). One of the current tenants is Ferdyshchenko. Overall, the apartment is "cramped and squeezed," which Ganya finds horrifying.

Ganya's suffering is caused by his vanity, but also by the expectations placed on him by the shallow society in which he lives, where people are obsessed with money and status. This leads Ganya to be mortified of the fact that his family keep tenants, which he views as a humiliating indication of poverty.

Currently, Nina and Varya are sitting with a visitor, Ivan Petrovich Ptitsyn. Nina is about 50 and sickly-looking, with a "pinched face." Varya is 23; her face is pleasing but not beautiful. Both women have a determined look to them. Ivan, meanwhile, is a quiet man of about 30 who is obviously attracted to Varya. He makes a living through giving out short-term loans and is one of Ganya's best friends. Ganya briskly introduces Myshkin to everyone, and Kolya proceeds to ask the prince a series of friendly questions about himself until Varya tells him to leave Myshkin alone.

Compared to the Epanchins, who are described as elegant, healthy, and beautiful, the Ivolgins appear to be a more troubled family. This is reflected in Nina's "pinched" and sickly appearance, as well as the general atmosphere of tension that exists in their apartment.

Alone again, Ganya asks Myshkin not to "blab" about what happened with Aglaya. Myshkin, annoyed, assures him that he won't. Myshkin goes to his room to freshen up. Shortly after, the unpleasant-looking Ferdyshchenko, who is about 30, appears. He tells Myshkin that he will surely ask to borrow money at some point, and requests that Myshkin does not give it to him. He asks if Myshkin intends to pay rent, and when Myshkin says he does, Ferdyshchenko replies that he himself does not. He then disappears.

Ferdyshchenko is one of several comic characters in the novel who act in clownish ways. However, just because they are funny and ridiculous doesn't mean that these characters are exempt from illustrating the novel's more serious themes (such as, in this case, money, greed, and corruption).

A new man comes in. He is about 55, rather fat and seedy-looking, and smells faintly of vodka. He introduces himself as General Ivolgin and mentions that he was childhood friends with Myshkin's father, and even held Myshkin as a baby. Ivolgin says he and Myshkin's father studied together and both served in the military. He admits that he was "passionately in love" with Myshkin's mother even while she was engaged to his friend. When Myshkin's father found out, he challenged Ivolgin to a duel, but both of them burst into tears before they could shoot. At this moment Kolya comes in, saying that Nina wants to see Myshkin.

General Ivolgin's story seems a bit too melodramatic and sentimental to be totally true, and the fact that the general smells like vodka indicates that he has perhaps exaggerated or invented parts of it. At the same time, considering how little information has been given about Myshkin's family, it is not impossible that everything Ivolgin is saying is true.

As Myshkin goes, Ivolgin mentions that it is humiliating that they have to have tenants, and mentions that tragedy has struck the family. He notes that he and Ganya barely speak anymore. In the living room, Nina says that she does not remember Myshkin's father. Ivolgin mentions Pavlishchev, whom he also knew. He then explains the court case for which Myshkin's father was on trial when he died. The case had to do with someone named Private Kolpakov, whom Myshkin's father punished for stealing, only for Kolpakov to apparently die and then, six months later, apparently come back from the dead. Nina says Ivolgin is mistaken in his telling, but Ivolgin insists he isn't, and that it was a mysterious, irresolvable case.

The fact that Ivolgin mentions Pavlishchev indicates that his relation to Myshkin's family is not entirely made up. However, the story that he tells after this casts further doubt on the accuracy of his memories. Nina's repeated assertions that she thinks her husband is mistaken or doesn't know what he is talking about further emphasize that Ivolgin is not a reliable narrator.

Varya announces that dinner is ready and Ivolgin reluctantly abandons his storytelling to leave. Nina explains that Ivolgin eats by himself, and asks Myshkin that she never give any rent money to her husband, only to her. At that moment, Varya hands her mother the portrait of Nastasya, and says that Nastasya plans to make her announcement regarding Ganya that evening. Nina tries to ask Myshkin what he knows about the situation with Nastasya, but at that moment Ganya and Ptitsyn come in. A heated discussion ensues between Nina and Ganya about Nastasya; Nina asks her son how he could agree to marry someone he doesn't love. Varya, meanwhile, insists that if Nastasya comes to live at the apartment, she herself will leave.

The impression that there are tensions within the Ivolgin family becomes more concrete in this passionate discussion. It is obvious that Nina does not fully trust General Ivolgin, and the fact that he eats in isolation further suggests that there might be something wrong with him. Meanwhile, the conflict between Ganya and his female relatives shows that in choosing to marry Nastasya, he would potentially be sacrificing a good relationship with his family.

Myshkin tries to sneak away, but Ganya sees him and yells at him. Myshkin says nothing and leaves, and instantly bumps into Nastasya, who has just arrived and flings her coat at him. Seemingly mistaking him for a servant, she demands that he announce her, and calls him an "idiot." She is surprised to find that Myshkin already knows who she is. He tells her that there is currently a fight going on, and then returns to the drawing room and announces her arrival.

It is almost comical that even though Nastasya is completely mistaken about Myshkin's identity, she accords with the other characters in declaring him to be an idiot. It seems that Myshkin's perceived "idiocy" is even more obvious to people than his rank or identity.

PART ONE, CHAPTER NINE

Nastasya enters and demands that Ganya introduce her. All members of Ganya's family are shocked into silence. Nastasya has never visited them before, presumably out of "haughtiness." Nina and Varya attempt to make an effort with Nastasya, but she interrupts the introductions to ask where the tenants are. While Nina begins to answer, Nastasya again interrupts by laughing at Ganya's comically horrified expression. Also noticing Ganya's look of horror, Myshkin quietly tells him to drink some water and stop staring. Furious, Ganya grabs Myshkin and shoots him a look full of hatred. Trying to dispel the tension, he asks if Myshkin thinks he's a doctor, and at that moment Nastasya laughs, saying she mistook Myshkin for a servant.

Although Myshkin is hardly to blame for all the drama unfolding in Ganya's life, Ganya nonetheless directs his anger and frustration at him. In this sense, Myshkin becomes a scapegoat figure. The irony, of course, is that Myshkin is actually the only person present trying to help Ganya in this scene. However, Ganya is too selfish and hot-headed to be grateful for this, and instead treats Myshkin with cruel fury.

Nastasya asks Myshkin why he didn't correct her mistake, and how he knew who she was. Myshkin explains that he's seen her portrait but adds that it seems like he's seen her elsewhere before, perhaps in a dream. General Ivolgin now enters, to Ganya's absolute horror. He introduces himself but then stumbles and falls into a chair, assisted by Ferdyshchenko. Nina loudly asks Nastasya to excuse the general, but Nastasya insists that he stay, asking why he has never come to a social event at her house and saying she is excited to meet him at last. Nina and Kolya both keeping trying to get Ivolgin to leave, but he will not.

It is now clear that General Ivolgin is a liability to the family due to his drunkenness. The reason why Nina is so ill and "pinched"-looking is because she spends her life trying to smooth over her husband's bad behavior, as indicated both by this passage and by her request that Myshkin pay his rent money directly to her. Nina obviously feels that it is important to hide Ivolgin's drinking so that they can keep up a respectable appearance.

General Ivolgin tells Nastasya that he, General Epanchin, and Myshkin's father used to be best friends, an "inseparable" trio. He tells a story about a time when he was smoking a cigar in a train carriage, sitting opposite two women speaking English and their small dog. Without saying anything, one of the women took the general's cigar and flung it out the window, at which point the general did the same thing to her dog. Nastasya laughs and claps in delight, and Ferdyshchenko and Kolya both shout, "Bravo!" Ivolgin says that the woman slapped him, at which point he "got carried away," although he insists he only wanted to wave his hand in warning.

General Ivolgin may bring embarrassment to his family, but he is also seen as an entertaining figure. Indeed, this tension between embarrassment and entertainment is present in many characters, including Myshkin. The characters obviously enjoy witnessing or hearing about scandalous behavior, but there is a constant risk of this going too far and bringing disgrace, which is seen as a horrifying possibility.

Unfortunately, one of the English ladies turned out to be a friend of Princess Belonsky, while the other was the princess's eldest daughter. Mrs. Epanchin has a special relationship to the Belonskys, and thus Ivolgin tried to beg their forgiveness, but ultimately all ties were cut between himself and the Epanchins as a result of this incident. Nastasya then says that the general must be lying, because she read the same story in the newspaper a few days ago. Everyone looks deeply embarrassed except Ferdyshchenko, who keeps laughing. The general tries to defend himself, but Nastasya laughs mercilessly. Ganya, fuming with horror, tries to get a moment alone with his father, but in that instant the doorbell rings loudly.

Nastasya's humiliation of Ivolgin further reveals her ruthless character and her love of scandal. Indeed, the way she chooses to humiliate him is particularly sadistic. Not only does she choose to publicly reveal that he stole the story from a newspaper, but she initially went along with it and clapped before revealing the story's inauthenticity. This demonstrates the dramatic, reckless flair with which she conducts her life.

PART ONE, CHAPTER TEN

Kolya opens the door and about 12 or 13 people, including Lebedev, Rogozhin, and two women, come in. They all seem tipsy, though not terribly drunk. Rogozhin greets Ganya in a friendly way, calling him an "old scoundrel," but then he sees Nastasya and gasps, unable to speak. He moves toward her as if drawn by some unseen force. Indignant, Ganya pretends to barely recognize Rogozhin, but Rogozhin immediately says that Ganya beat him in a gambling game in which he was cheated out of money. He boasts about how much money he has now, saying he could buy them all.

There is certainly a parallel between the way Rogozhin and Nastasya dramatically introduce scandal to the situations they enter. Both of them are ruthless when it comes to other people's emotions, and enjoy destroying the veneer of civility and propriety that characterizes the social world of the novel.

Rogozhin then turns to Nastasya and asks directly if she plans to marry Ganya. Nastasya first gives him a "mocking and haughty glance," but then admits, more seriously, that she will certainly not marry him. Rogozhin says the rumor is that they're engaged. Flustered, Ganya accuses him of being drunk and tells him to leave. Lebedev whispers to Rogozhin, who then brashly places 18,000 roubles on the table, saying it's for Nastasya and that there will be more. Nastasya laughs, calling him a "boor," and Rogozhin promises 100,000 instead. General Ivolgin suddenly shouts as if he only just noticed what was going on, and everyone laughs. Kolya starts crying, and Varya demands that someone remove "this shameless woman" (Nastasya) from the apartment.

The fact that Rogozhin and Ganya's romantic rivalry so quickly turns into an ad-hoc auction reveals the sinister dynamics of power and money undergirding superficially civil and polite society. In an instant, Nastasya is reduced to an object that ca be purchased by whoever is the highest bidder. While readers in the present day likely find this outrageous, in reality it is actually only a dramatized representation of the dynamics found in most marriage arrangements during this time.

Ganya is horrified and tries to drag Varya away, but she spits in his face. Ganya then tries to strike her, but Myshkin steps in between them and gets slapped instead. Everyone is shocked. Kolya embraces Myshkin, and many others soon gather around them. Rogozhin tells Ganya he will regret what he's done, and asks Myshkin to come with him. Nastasya is deeply moved by this act of violence. Myshkin tells her that really, she is "not like that" (shameless). Nastasya whispers to Nina, kisses her hand, and then leaves. Ganya tries to rush after her, but she has already gone. Rogozhin then leaves too, shouting to Ganya: "The game's up, Ganka!"

This is the first of several incidents in the novel in which an act of violence has a profound, transformative impact on a particular dynamic. The fact that Ganya's violence is accidentally misdirected against the innocent Myshkin gives the whole scene a feeling of chaos. As the characters recover from what has just happened, it is obvious that a profound shift in the social dynamic between them has taken place.

PART ONE, CHAPTER ELEVEN

Prince Myshkin immediately goes to his room, and Kolya follows him. Kolya comments on Nastasya's beauty and says he wouldn't blame Ganya for all the mess if he loved her, but he actually only wants to marry her for money. Myshkin admits that he doesn't really like Ganya. Varya enters and asks why Myshkin told Nastasya that she isn't "like that," considering the two don't know each other. Before Myshkin has time to answer, Ganya enters and begs for forgiveness. Myshkin is moved, and the two of them embrace. Myshkin tries to get Ganya to apologize to Varya too, but Ganya replies: "No, they're all my enemies."

Although Myshkin has only arrived at the Ivolgins' house that day, he has already come to occupy a central place in the social world of the family. This is clearly illustrated by the fact that each of the Ivolgin children rush straight into Myshkin's room after the dramatic incident outside. It is also notable that Ganya's evident hatred of Myshkin does not stop him from needing his approval, as he has now twice begged Myshkin for his forgiveness. This suggests that, on some level, Ganya senses Myshkin's moral fortitude and wisdom despite writing him off as an idiot.

Varya leaves, and Myshkin observes that Ganya should be careful if he's just marrying Nastasya for money. This is firstly because Nastasya might reject him, and secondly because often a bride's money does not actually end up going to her husband. Ganya calls Nastasya "irritable, suspicious, and vain," but says he is certain she will agree to marry him. Ganya admits that he did love her at first, and that he hopes she will not "rebel." If she does, he will take the money and abandon her. Ganya thinks that Nastasya believes he loves her; he is also convinced that, in some way, she loves him, too.

Ganya's words here show that he is not only greedy and corrupt, but also somewhat delusional. He does not heed Myshkin's sensible warning about the dangers of marrying only for money. Meanwhile, his belief that Nastasya loves him and thinks he loves her does not seem plausible, given everything that has just happened during her visit.

Myshkin comments that while he earlier he thought Ganya was a "scoundrel," but that he now sees him as "ordinary," in the sense that most men are weak and flawed. Ganya curses his father, telling Myshkin that General Ivolgin has a mistress. He says that his decision to marry Nastasya for her 75,000-rouble dowry is not rational, but rather driven by "passion." He will not spend the money at once, but rather wait patiently in order to achieve his eventual aim of making his own fortune through finance, (like Ptitsyn, who was formerly homeless and is now rich).

This passage contains yet another intriguing conceptualization of "passion." Ordinarily, passion might be associated with romantic emotion—the opposite of choosing to marry someone for money. Yet Ganya implies that he has a passion for money. Once again, passion is associated with immoral forms of desire.

Ganya says that when he is rich he will be "original" because money actually creates talent. He asks Myshkin if he is in love with Nastasya, but Myshkin replies that he only likes her. Ganya leaves, and Kolya arrives, carrying a note from General Ivolgin. Myshkin says that he needs to see the general, anyway, and goes off to meet him.

Ganya's desire to be "original" comes after Myshkin accuses him of being "ordinary." Given that Myshkin's assessment was based on Ganya's flawed nature, it doesn't seem likely that this ordinariness could be solved by becoming wealthy.

PART ONE, CHAPTER TWELVE

Kolya takes Myshkin to a café and billiard parlor called Liteinaya. On seeing Myshkin, General Ivolgin tries to explain something to him, but is so drunk that it comes out as nonsense. Realizing that he wants money, Myshkin gives the general his 25-rouble note and asks for 15 back. Myshkin asks if General Ivolgin will help him get into Nastasya's party that evening, despite not having been invited. Ivolgin replies that he was hoping to do the very same thing. He suggests they go together at 9 p.m. In the meantime, he gets very drunk, and begins telling a lot of stories without ending them. By the time they leave, General Ivolgin can barely stand, and Myshkin feels foolish for relying on him.

This passage contains an obvious example of where Myshkin's moral innocence slides into foolishness. General Ivolgin is clearly an alcoholic who, as indicated by Nina, is irresponsible with money. Meanwhile, Myshkin has only 25 roubles to his name and no guarantee of getting more anytime soon. Yet Myshkin nonetheless gives Ivolgin 10 roubles, likely for no other reason than his profound kindness, generosity, and lack of judgment.

As they walk, General Ivolgin rambles about his misfortune and repeatedly mentions the 13 bullets that are supposedly lodged in his chest. He insists on taking Myshkin to General Sokolovich's place, but once there Myshkin realizes that they've gone to someone else's apartment entirely. Soon they learn that whoever lives there isn't home. Walking away, Ivolgin suddenly remembers that the Sokoloviches live elsewhere, perhaps even in Moscow. When Ivolgin suggests that they go to see a widow named Mrs. Terentyev instead, Myshkin firmly insists that he must go to Nastasya's on his own. However, the general insists that they stick together, and at this point they run into Kolya, who says that Mrs. Terentyev is expecting Ivolgin.

Despite Myshkin's open-hearted nature, he is not naïve enough to still believe at this point that following General Ivolgin was a good idea. However, after realizing that he ought to leave Ivolgin and go off alone, Myshkin struggles to assert himself. His kind spirit makes him overly compliant, leaving him unable to properly establish his own agency.

When they arrive at Mrs. Terentyev's house, she immediately chastises Ivolgin for stealing from her. Ivolgin apologizes and hands her 25 roubles, while introducing her to Myshkin. He then announces that he feels weak, lies down, and falls asleep. Myshkin asks Kolya to take him to Nastasya's house instead, and Kolya, surprised, informs the prince that he and Ivolgin had been heading in the wrong direction the whole time. Kolya says he'd first like to introduce Myshkin to Ippolit, the widow's eldest son, who is bedridden with tuberculosis. He mentions that Ippolit is "the slave of certain prejudices."

Not only is General Ivolgin a drunk, but—as this scene reveals—he has a debt problem, too. The fact that the only money Myshkin possesses has immediately disappeared again emphasizes that Myshkin's kind-hearted nature can be a dangerous form of foolishness.

Kolya is shocked to learn that Myshkin plans to go to Nastasya's party dressed as he is. He then talks about the Terentyev family, saying that Mrs. Terentyev shamelessly borrows money from Ivolgin and then makes him pay her back with interest, whereas Nina and Varya give Ippolit and the other children money because their mother neglects them. Ippolit is very bitter and cynical, and thus at first sneered at Nina and Varya's kindness. However, now he appreciates it. Ganya, meanwhile, doesn't know about the arrangement. Kolya says he soon plans to get a job, and suggests that he, Myshkin, and Ippolit get an apartment together. Myshkin agrees. Having arrived at Nastasya's, Kolya wishes Myshkin luck and bids him farewell.

Kolya's instant affection for Myshkin proves Myshkin's earlier point about his natural affinity with children. Like Myshkin, Kolya is kind and friendly, but also somewhat naïve. This emerges through the fact that he wants to move out of his house, yet is only a schoolboy with no source of income. Indeed, this is another point of connection between Myshkin and Kolya, one indicating that, while they may be great friends, they might also struggle to survive the world together.

PART ONE, CHAPTER THIRTEEN

As he walks up to the stairs, Myshkin is afraid of being laughed out of Nastasya's apartment. He has come because he wants to warn Nastasya that Ganya only wants to marry her for her money. There is also another "unresolved" element to his being there, which he won't let himself even think about. Nastasya's apartment is small, but luxuriously furnished. When she first moved to St. Petersburg, Totsky tried to win her over with money, yet while Nastasya likes luxury she has never become attached to it. She has a strange mix of people in her "circle," despite Totsky having tried to school her into becoming the most refined kind of woman.

This passage further elaborates on the way Nastasya is able to establish and maintain power despite being so oppressively victimized by both Totsky and the broader society in which she lives. Completely central is her decision to neither refuse the money Totsky gives her nor become overly attached to it. Similarly, she does not eschew society altogether, but rather creates an unusual and scandalous social world to suit her own needs.

To Myshkin's surprise, Nastasya's maid does not seem remotely disturbed by his appearance and brings him inside. Totsky and General Epanchin are already there, along with a miserable Ganya. Seeing Myshkin, Nastasya immediately mentions the earlier incident in which Ganya slapped him, which greatly intrigues Epanchin. Ganya tells the story, and notes that although some people have been calling Myshkin an idiot, in reality he is anything but. However, the group's attention soon switches to Rogozhin, who has spent the day trying to get together 100,000 roubles. Ptitsyn expresses his certainty that Rogozhin will get it. Everyone reacts to this story with grim concern except Ferdyshchenko, who laughs vulgarly.

Here, two different camps emerge among the characters: those who are horrified by scandal (including Ganya, Varya, Nina, and Kolya), and those who are fascinated by it (including Nastasya, Rogozhin, and Ferdyshchenko). Myshkin falls somewhere in the middle. Although he expresses concern about immoral, cruel, and violent acts, he is also not overly disturbed by the type of scandal caused by violation of social norms. Indeed, he has already caused some of these scandals himself.

Among the remaining guests is a "pathetic little old schoolteacher," an actress of about 40 (Darya), and an astonishingly beautiful, seemingly very rich young woman. When Myshkin arrives, everyone is pleasantly surprised if a little confused, including Nastasya, who greets him enthusiastically. Ferdyshchenko rudely comments on the fact that Myshkin has invited himself, but Epanchin rebukes him. A squabble ensues in which Ferdyshchenko teases the general and Epanchin grows increasingly annoyed. Anyone who wants to spend time with Nastasya has to "put up with Ferdyshchenko."

Nastasya and Ferdyshchenko share certain qualities, including a rather ruthless, scandalous, and vulgar way of being. There is also an indication that Nastasya may keep Ferdyshchenko around in order to ward off certain kinds of people. If spending time with her means spending time with Ferdyshchenko, Nastasya perhaps protects herself from the kind of uptight person who would find Ferdyshchenko absolutely intolerable.

Quietly, Nastasya tells Myshkin that she regrets having not invited him and is glad he came anyway. Myshkin tells her: "Everything in you is perfection," which seems to please her. She introduces him to everyone else and sits him next to her. Ganya mentions a confession Myshkin made to him, but Myshkin, blushing, denies having said anything of the kind. Unexpectedly, the schoolteacher then observers that Myshkin "blushes at an innocent joke like an innocent girl," and that this must mean he has a pure heart. Everyone laughs (although unbeknown to the schoolteacher, they are more laughing *at* him than with him), and Nastasya kisses the old man. She is fond of strange elderly people and holy fools.

Perhaps because of her unusual upbringing and early trauma, Nastasya seeks out oddballs and outcasts. She embraces those who have a unique perspective rather than people who follow convention. This is hardly surprising considering how much she has been harmed by "respectable" society and its members, particularly Totsky.

Nastasya offers champagne, and everyone except Ganya accepts. Nastasya is in a strange mood and claims to have a fever. Totsky suggests they let her rest, but Nastasya insists that they stay. The actress suggests playing a parlor game, and Ferdyshchenko suggests a game in which everyone goes around and tells the worst thing they have ever done. The guests remark that this is a strange game, and Totsky calls it "a peculiar sort of boasting." Yet Nastasya wants to play, and no one wants to contradict her wishes. Ferdyshchenko says that the women do not have to participate, and asks that all stories are appropriate enough to be shared in female company.

The parlor game is one of the most obvious moments at which the novel grapples with questions of guilt, sin, and immorality. Unlike the morally pure Myshkin, many of the characters have a tolerant or even enthusiastic attitude toward immoral behavior—as is evidenced by Totsky's statement that the parlor game could be interpreted as "a peculiar sort of boasting." Of course, he might also mean that people could lie to make themselves look more *moral.*

Ganya asks how they will know if someone is lying, and Ferdyshchenko says it shouldn't matter to him, because everyone already knows his worst deed. They draw lots, which determines that Ferdyshchenko goes first. Nastasya suddenly seems irritable, as does Totsky, who is looking furiously at General Epanchin.

Unsurprisingly, this game appears to be poised to cause even more scandal and drama among the guests at Nastasya's party.

PART ONE, CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Ferdyshchenko declares that he thinks that the number of immoral people in the world probably outweighs those who are moral, and that everyone has stolen something in their lives. A debate ensues, until Nastasya tells Ferdyshchenko to hurry up with his turn. He tells a story about how he stole three roubles from the daughter of an acquaintance, let the maid take the blame for it, and then spent the money on alcohol. The maid was dismissed the next day and Ferdyshchenko said nothing about it. The guests are largely unimpressed by this story, and this infuriates Ferdyshchenko. Ptitsyn is next, but he refuses to participate.

Considering that Ferdyshchenko is known as a vulgar, wicked person, it is arguably surprising that his story is rather tame. Of course, this could mean that he is lying. On the other hand, it could also indicate that Ferdyshchenko's vulgarity is not evidence of some terrible moral depravity. He might simply be an unpleasant person who people mistakenly believe is deeply immoral.

General Epanchin is next, and says that the story they are about to hear has troubled him for 35 years. When it happened, he had just been made lieutenant. He had an orderly named Nikifor who was extremely honest and dutiful. He lived with the elderly widow of a lieutenant who had died 45 years earlier. An argument erupted between Epanchin and the old lady regarding a stolen rooster, and he and Nikifor moved away. However, he then learned that the old woman kept his bowl when he moved as a kind of punishment, and went back to yell at her. She didn't respond, and later Epanchin learned that she actually died while he stood there shouting at her.

General Epanchin's story certainly seems like the kind of thing that could weigh on a person's conscience for years. However, his selection of it is rather clever, because although it is clear why he feels guilty, he didn't knowingly commit any grave wrong. Yelling at an old woman who has stolen from you may be ungenerous, but it is not truly awful. Epanchin could not have known, after all, that the woman was dying.

Epanchin was greatly disturbed by the incident, and even though much time has passed, it still troubles him today. He only began to feel better after he started paying for places for two sick old women in the almshouse, something he began doing 15 years ago and wishes to continue even after his death. Next up is Totsky, who shares something that happened 20 years previously. It was during a time when the popularity of Dumas's *La Dame aux camélias* made camellias extremely sought-after in Russian high society. A man Totsky knew called Petya Vorkhovskoy was desperately in love with a young woman named Anfisa Alexeevna. Vorkhovskoy tried his best to get Anfisa camellias but failed, whereas Totsky succeeded.

Both General Epanchin and Totsky's stories contain actual boasts (rather than the perverse form of boasting Totsky was describing earlier). Epanchin's story ends up being a way for him to demonstrate his eagerness to redeem himself and, ultimately, his upstanding nature. Meanwhile, Totsky contains a detail about how he succeeded in a romantic rivalry. Furthermore, given that we know he sexually abused Nastasya for years, this story cannot possibly be the worst thing he has ever done.

Distraught, Vorkhovskoy ended up sending himself to the Caucasus and dying in the Crimean War. While telling the story, Totsky mentions several good deeds he did, such as donating 100 roubles to a hospital. Nastasya dryly comments that the game is becoming boring, and that after she tells her story they will stop playing. Suddenly, she turns to Myshkin and asks him if she should marry Ganya. There is a long pause, before Myshkin stammers that she shouldn't. Nastasya says that in that case she won't, and the other guests begin protesting this decision. They are confused about why she has let the prince decide for her, but she asserts: "He believed in me from the first glance, and I trust him."

It is clear from this passage that in playing the game, Nastasya was hoping to cause a great scandal. When the supposed worst deeds that people choose to reveal turn out to be inconsequential, she realizes she will have to take a different route. It might seem strange that Nastasya, who is so obsessed with scandal and immorality, would trust the advice of Myshkin when it comes to determining her romantic life. Yet her justification hints that Myshkin might be the first person to ever believe in her.

Humiliated, Ganya sarcastically thanks Nastasya for the way she has treated him. Nastasya replies that she knows he is upset about losing the 75,000 roubles, which she tells Totsky he can keep. She also tells General Epanchin that he can take the pearls he gave her and give them to his wife instead, and that as of the next day, she will leave her apartment. Everyone cries out in shock, and at that moment the doorbell rings.

Here, Nastasya dramatically reveals that she knew all about the secret schemes and dynamics lying beneath the plan for her and Ganya to become engaged. In doing so, she shames all the people who participated in creating this rather elaborate plot.

PART ONE, CHAPTER FIFTEEN

The new arrival is Rogozhin, accompanied by his group of around 12 people. The maid tells Nastasya that they are all very drunk, however Nastasya tells her to welcome them in anyway. The guests' reaction is mixed; at first it seems as if General Epanchin is leaving in protest, but then he says he will stay, both out of curiosity and to protect Nastasya. Quietly, Epanchin asks Totsky if he thinks Nastasya has gone insane, emphasizing that he means this literally. Although Rogozhin's whole crew is drunk, none of them are completely out of control, and Rogozhin himself has managed to almost totally sober up. All day he has remained single-mindedly fixated on Nastasya, and has managed to gather the 100,000 roubles in cash that he promised earlier.

Rogozhin pursues Nastasya with a kind of wild, single-minded passion. He is clearly ready to do a great deal in order to win her, including making personal sacrifices. (Although, given his enormous wealth, it is unclear whether 100,000 roubles even means that much to him.) Yet there is also an obvious way in which he does not take her—or perhaps anything—seriously. This is shown by the fact that he rudely shows up drunk to her apartment accompanied by so many other people.

Rogozhin walks toward Nastasya and on the way steps on the expensive dress of the unnamed young woman. However, he does not even notice he has done this. He puts the 100,000 roubles on the table. He then sits down and is shocked to see Myshkin standing there among the guests. Nastasya announces to everyone that there are 100,000 roubles lying before her. She then recounts the events of the day, including the drama at Ganya's house. She concludes that Rogozhin has "priced" her at 100,000. Horrified, Darya says Nastasya should take the money and kick Rogozhin out.

Nastasya doesn't exactly fight against her own commodification, but instead undermines it by openly acknowledging it. Yet ultimately, it remains unclear whether she (or anyone) holds any power in this situation. She may be once again asserting authority by embracing scandal, but this does not necessarily correspond to possessing actual power or agency.

Nastasya then speaks directly to Ganya, saying she knows he hates her and that he is so greedy he would probably "kill for money." She then tells everyone that she could have married someone years ago, and even considered marrying Totsky. He proposed, and she was tempted to accept out of "spite." However, she determined that it wouldn't be worth it. Now she has many suitors, but once she leaves her luxurious apartment and Totsky's allowance no one will want her. Ferdyshchenko interjects to say that Myshkin will take her, and Nastasya asks if this is true. Myshkin shyly confirms that it is.

Ferdyshchenko's suggestion that Myshkin would be willing to marry Nastasya even though she is poor is likely nothing more than an absurd joke, given that this is the only way in which he seems to relate to the world. Yet this joke unexpectedly contains truth. Perhaps Myshkin came to Nastasya's party not only because he wanted to stop her marrying Ganya, but because he is drawn to her himself.

Nastasya mocks Myshkin and his kindness toward her, but he replies by saying that she has endured great pain and "emerged pure from such a hell." He then tells her he loves her. He says he wouldn't mind if they were poor, but they might in fact be very rich, as it's possible he's about to receive a large inheritance. He takes out a letter from a lawyer named Salazkin, which informs him of his inheritance. Ptitsyn comments that Salazkin is a respected lawyer who they all know, and that Myshkin can trust his word. Ptitsyn takes the letter to see if it's genuine.

This chapter ends with another unexpected plot twist. Up until now, Myshkin has been dismissed as a minor and pathetic figure by most of the characters, and this is due to his poverty as much as it is to his idiocy. The fact that he might inherit a large fortune could drastically change the way other characters perceive him, and compel them to take him more seriously.

PART ONE, CHAPTER SIXTEEN

After a long pause, Ptitsyn confirms the letter's veracity. Everyone gasps. Ptitsyn explains that Myshkin's inheritance comes via his late aunt, who spent most of her life in poverty until, just before death, she herself received an unexpected inheritance from her brother-in-law. She was not able to contact Myshkin before she died, but left him the money in her will. Ptitsyn says that Salazkin's words prove that Myshkin is set to inherit 1.5 million roubles or more. Hearing this, a few guests drunkenly shout for joy, while others wait to congratulate the prince directly. Slowly, everyone remembers that Myshkin also just proposed to Nastasya.

With each new twist that has taken place in this highly dramatic scene, the power dynamics between the characters shift. In this sense, the scene is a little like a game of chess, in which each move (or scandalous plot twist) forces everyone to readjust their relationship to each other and their expectations of what will happen next. By this point, there have been so many unexpected twists that the characters themselves struggle to remember them.

Nastasya herself seems to be in shock, but then suddenly announces that she is a princess after all. She asks that someone bring champagne to toast her and Myshkin. Nastasya asks Myshkin if he'll be ashamed that his wife almost married Rogozhin, or that she was Totsky's "kept woman," but Myshkin assures her he won't be. He promises to take care of her and respect her for their whole lives. Nastasya thanks Myshkin for his kindness, but then asks Rogozhin to stay, saying she might still choose him. She declares that she could never "ruin" an innocent like Myshkin, and that he deserves Aglaya instead. Rogozhin is overjoyed, shouting: "She's mine! It's all mine!"

Nastasya's wavering on the issue of whether or not she is going to marry Myshkin might appear to be an unforgivable form of cruelty. Yet the fact that she says she is worried about ruining Myshkin suggests that her doubt is coming from a selfless place, and she actually does not want to harm him. Perhaps she considers marrying Rogozhin because she thinks that she deserves someone corrupt and immoral. She may want to believe Myshkin's assertion that she is pure, but is not able to.

Nastasya rebukes Rogozhin, saying it's still her who's in control. She tells Myshkin that it's better this way. She used to dream of marrying someone "kind, honest, [and] good" who saw her as untainted, but her dreams were interrupted by Totsky's sexual abuse. She asks Rogozhin if he's ready to go, and then says that before they leave, she wants to leave something for Ganya. She throws the packet of money into the fire and tells Ganya to retrieve it. Everyone is horrified, and General Epanchin asks if they should tie Nastasya up, as she is certainly insane now. Lebedev tries to get the money, but Nastasya stops him, saying it's only for Ganya.

Nastasya's actions might be perceived as cruel and insane by the other characters, but the speech she gives beforehand explaining how her actions are informed by her trauma puts her in a sympathetic light. Furthermore, her decision to humiliate Ganya by throwing the money in the fire is arguably nothing compared to Ganya's willingness to marry her for money as part of an elaborate scheme to benefit himself and Totsky.

Ganya stands silent, dressed to leave, and watches the money burn. Everyone starts shouting that the money will burn up. Ganya goes to leave, and at this moment he drops to the floor, apparently having fainted. On seeing this, Nastasya orders her maids to get him water, and retrieves the packet of money from the fire. Everyone is relieved to see that only the newspaper it was wrapped in has burned, and that the money itself is safe. She gives it to Ganya, who is still unconscious. Nastasya kisses her maids and cook goodbye, who cry at the thought of her leaving, and declares that she's going to live in the street. As the guests leave, Totsky comments that although the evening was "indecent," it was also "colorful."

Whatever callousness Nastasya showed to Ganya by throwing the money in the fire is alleviated here by her kind attentiveness after he faints. Furthermore, although it takes a subtle, more polite form, the callousness of Totsky's remarks at the very end of the passage arguably dwarf anything that Nastasya has done so far. In casually calling the evening "colorful," Totsky reveals his total lack of care for Nastasya and the serious extent to which he has ruined her life.

PART TWO, CHAPTER ONE

A couple of days after Nastasya's party, Myshkin goes to Moscow to claim his inheritance. He stays there for six months, and those in St. Petersburg mostly avoid talking about him. However, rumors still manage to spread about him, which tend to be very ridiculous. There are also rumors stating that Nastasya has disappeared to Moscow, and that Rogozhin went after her. Ganya becomes very ill for a month, and when he recovers he quits his job, perhaps due to humiliation over everything that has happened to him. Varya marries Ptitsyn, supposedly because with Ganya not working, the family needs income.

Even in the wake of a scandal as dramatic as Nastasya's birthday party, life eventually goes back to normal—or at least, a new normal. This return to normality is aided by people like Varya, who—in opposition to more dramatic and self-centered characters—is pragmatic and puts the needs of others before herself.

In the early hours of the morning after Nastasya's party, Ganya gave Myshkin the packet of money and begged him to return it to Nastasya on his behalf. News of this, along with the dramatic events of Nastasya's party, reached the Epanchin women almost immediately. It possibly came via Varya, who became close to the Epanchin sisters very quickly. Mrs. Epanchin has a low opinion of Varya, even though she has a huge amount of respect for Nina. Before long, Mrs. Epanchin receives news from Princess Belokonsky in Moscow about Myshkin. The princess adores Myshkin, and this "breaks the ice," allowing the Epanchin women to start talking about him again.

The Epanchins' shallow nature is perfectly demonstrated by the fact that they require the intervention of a high-ranking friend in order to assure themselves that it is acceptable to speak to Myshkin again. This is particularly ridiculous considering that Myshkin himself, while he was certainly embroiled in the scandal at Nastasya's, did not actually do anything immoral. Yet his violation of social norms was so great that the Epanchins almost cut him off forever.

From Belokonsky, the Epanchin women learn that while Myshkin did receive his inheritance, it was not nearly as much as it had originally appeared. When Mrs. Epanchin learns that Myshkin paid off various shady creditors to whom his aunt's brother-in-law supposedly owed money, she calls him a "fool," but it is also clear that she cares for him as if he were her own child. More news arrives that after Rogozhin found Nastasya in Moscow, she promised to marry him, but then ran away again. During this period, Alexandra's engagement to Totsky was also broken off. The whole Epanchin family was left in a grim mood. General Epanchin laments the loss of "such a fortune, and such a dexterous man!"

Again, the social world of the characters resembles a game of chess, in which each single act engenders one set of possibilities, while foreclosing others. While it is not made explicit that the end of Totsky's engagement to Alexandra had anything to do with what happened at Nastasya's, we already know that Totsky felt unable to marry until Nastasya herself was married. The chain reaction of events at Nastasya's has thus left Alexandra without a husband.

Also during this time, Prince Shch., a well-known and widely admired individual, arrives in St. Petersburg. He is highly educated, hard-working, rich, and of very noble birth. He takes a liking to Adelaida, and in the spring proposes to her. The Epanchin family postpone their long summer holiday for the wedding. While the family are planning the wedding, another very rich, noble, charming, and intelligent suitor, Evgeny Pavlovich R., begins visiting them, this time taking a liking to Aglaya. Although he is known as a heartbreaker, he has earned the affection of Princess Belokonsky, which raises him the esteem of the Epanchin family.

Although both these suitors have excellent qualities, these qualities appear to matter less than the fact that they receive the approval of Princess Belokonsky. Belokonsky herself is perhaps not particularly interested in or qualified to find a match that will make the Epanchin women happy. However, simply because she is so high-ranking, her opinion counts above all.

After Myshkin left, Kolya initially kept going about his life as usual. Ferdyshchenko disappeared. After Varya got married, Nina and Ganya moved with her to Ptitsyn's house, while General Ivolgin got thrown into debtor's prison after Mrs. Terentyev reported him. He didn't have a terrible time there, but Nina was devastated. During this time, Kolya began to go off the rails, and was known to spend much time at the debtor's prison. He also spent a lot of time with the Epanchin daughters, who "gradually grew to love him," with the exception of Aglaya, who found him annoying. Mrs. Epanchin even grew fond of him, despite the fact that they occasionally fought, and he once called her a "despot."

Many of the young people in the novel are rebellious, although this rebellion takes many different forms and has very different causes. For Kolya, the trauma of having his father sent to prison (and perhaps the impact of witnessing other scandals) appears to make him lose respect for his elders and for the "proper" way of doing things.

Kolya once gave Aglaya a short, pleading note from Myshkin, in which he told her he needed her and that he was desperate to know if she was happy. Aglaya was initially disturbed by the note, but after a while it delighted her. Still, Aglaya remained perturbed that Myshkin had chosen to communicate via "such a pipsqueak."

Myshkin's romantic interest might seem promiscuous, but this is not because he is a heartbreaker (unlike Aglaya's other suitor). Rather, it is because he has such boundless, Christian love for everyone.

PART TWO, CHAPTER TWO

In early June, the Epanchins depart for their dacha in Pavlovsk. Only a day or so later, Myshkin arrives back in St. Petersburg. He has a different wardrobe now, one made up of well-made clothes that are in fact *too* fashionable, with comic results. Arriving back, he feels a pair of sinister eyes staring at him. He goes straight to Lebedev's house from the train station. The house is surprisingly nice, and he finds Lebedev inside, talking to young people in mourning wear, along with a strange, dark-haired man of about 20, who is lying down. On seeing the prince, Lebedev greets him enthusiastically. Although it is the daytime, Lebedev is obviously drunk. One of the young people explains that their mother died five weeks ago.

Lebedev may be a comic character, but the recent death of his wife indicates that, like everyone, he must face serious issues and painful hardships. The combination of comedy and tragedy in Lebedev's life is actually reflective of the novel as a whole. While The Idiot *is lighter and funnier than some of Dostoevsky's other work, it constantly reminds the reader that violence, death, cruelty, trauma, and illness are pervasive, inescapable parts of life.*

Lebedev starts speaking somewhat nonsensically about a case that's been in the papers of a family who were murdered. The dark-haired young man says that he recites the same speech every day. This young man, Lebedev's nephew, observes that the visitor must be Myshkin, whom he's heard about from Kolya. Kolya says Myshkin is the most intelligent person in the world. The nephew then tells Myshkin a story about how he gambled and lost 20 roubles to a lieutenant from Rogozhin's old band. The nephew confessed the whole thing to Lebedev and tried to borrow money from him, promising to pay it back as soon as he starts his new job on the railways. However, Lebedev has refused.

Although the families represented in the novel are quite different from one another, they tend to be affected by the same set of issues, including alcoholism, debt, gambling, and other forms of vice. This raises these issues to the status of social problems, rather than individual afflictions. Indeed, the picture Dostoevsky paints is of a troubled, unhealthy society trapped in cycles of immoral behavior.

The nephew observes that Lebedev has become extremely paranoid about being robbed and calls him a "drunken mumbler" who has been praying for the countess du Barry. Lebedev interrupts to talk about how he cared for his nephew, who is the son of his widowed sister. He then explains that he's just read a biography of du Barry, who rose from "a life of shame" to the French royal court. During the French Revolution, she was executed via guillotine in front of a crowd. Although she did not understand what was happening, du Barry begged for one more little minute" before she was killed. Lebedev says that when he read this, "it was as if my heart was in pincers."

Even the foolish Lebedev elicits sympathy through the fact that he is grieving and through his sympathy (however misguided) for Madame du Barry. Lebedev's retelling of Du Barry's story suggests that sometimes political issues ought to be put aside in order to focus on the common humanity connecting everyone. Regardless of Du Barry's position and complicity in a deeply corrupt society, she arguably did not deserve the torture of imprisonment and execution.

Myshkin asks for the nephew's name, and he replies that it's Timofei Lukyanovich (Doktorenko). Myshkin says he is trying to find Kolya, and Doktorenko replies that Kolya spent the night there, and has possibly been with "the general" (Ivolgin) who Myshkin helped free from prison. Now, Kolya might even be in Pavlovsk with the Epanchins. Lebedev and Myshkin then go out into Lebedev's pretty garden alone, and Myshkin asks if it's true that Nastasya has deserted Rogozhin for good this time. Lebedev that Nastasya indeed abandoned Rogozhin at the altar, and that she might still be in St. Petersburg now, or possibly in Pavlovsk at Darya's dacha. Lebedev says that the last time he saw Nastasya, they discussed the apocalypse. Lebedev thinks they are living in the end times.

Nastasya's ongoing indecision about who to marry seems to reflect a profound internal turmoil. On one hand, she was seduced by the idea of marrying Myshkin, which would mean being with someone who loved her and saw her as uncorrupted. Yet at the same time, Nastasya seems unable to escape the idea that Rogozhin is who she deserves. Even as she keeps coming back to this conviction, though, she cannot stick to it, and is thus trapped going around in circles thanks to her indecision.

Lebedev continues to tell somewhat fantastical stories and Myshkin eventually gets up to leave, saying he doesn't feel well after his journey. Lebedev says that he will soon be going to Pavlovsk, too, to stay in a small but lovely dacha owned by Ptitsyn. Myshkin asks if Lebedev will rent him the *dacha*, and Lebedev agrees. He then mischievously tells Myshkin that Nastasya will likely be visiting her friend Darya's *dacha* often, "with a purpose." Myshkin dismisses this, annoyed. He is suddenly so consumed by thought that he leaves without saying goodbye.

As was customary among this class of people in Russia at the time, the characters in the novel spend summer at a country house in Pavlovsk, a town 30 kilometers away from St. Petersburg, which was built around one of the main palaces owned by the Russian Imperial family. The characters' relocation to this town heightens the sense that they occupy a claustrophobic social world where every person is subject to intense scrutiny.

PART TWO, CHAPTER THREE

Myshkin wants to go to the Epanchins' house, even though he knows that the only person likely to be there is General Epanchin. There is another visit he wants to make, but is not sure he should; nonetheless, he soon finds himself standing outside Rogozhin's "dreary" house. When Rogozhin opens the door and sees Myshkin, he goes white, but then welcomes him in. Myshkin tells Rogozhin that when he got off the train at St. Petersburg station, he felt a pair of eyes staring at him. He says he is beginning to feel as he did at the height of his illness. They have a somewhat stilted conversation, and Myshkin observes that Rogozhin's house suits him perfectly: "So gloomy. You sit in such gloom."

There is a highly sinister, slightly surreal quality to Rogozhin's gloomy house and Myshkin's feeling that Rogozhin's eyes were staring at him. Here Rogozhin (along with his house) appears to be less than a real person, and more an embodiment of all the evil, corruption, and fear that haunts the world of the novel and Myshkin in particular. Again, this characterization of Rogozhin is a direct foil for the lighthearted innocence that Myshkin displays throughout the novel.

Rogozhin says castrates used to live in the house. Myshkin notices a portrait of Rogozhin's father and asks if he was an Old Believer. Rogozhin says that he wasn't. Myshkin then emphasizes that in trying to prevent Rogozhin marrying Nastasya, he was attempting to save Rogozhin as much as Nastasya, because he would also be destroyed by the marriage. Myshkin says that he loves Rogozhin, and goes to leave. Rogozhin asks him to stay, explaining that while Myshkin was gone he resented him, but now he is back he cannot help but love him again.

Here, "Old Believer" refers to a follower of an older form of Russian Orthodox Christianity that largely fell away following a schism. Even in this uncomfortable situation, Myshkin is still concerned with faith. Myshkin is so pure and innocent, such an absolute embodiment of goodness, that even Rogozhin, who is a disturbed and perhaps even evil character, cannot help but love him. At the same time, the fact that Rogozhin proclaims to love Myshkin does not mean that Myshkin is safe from harm. Rogozhin also loves Nastasya, and the way he treats her is possessive and cruel.

Rogozhin admits that Nastasya "hates" him, even though she has agreed to marry him. He is convinced that after abandoning him at the altar, Nastasya had an affair with an officer called Zemtiuzhnikov. He has avoided her for five days, but in their previous actions she would either laugh at him or scowl and remain silent. When he gave her an unimaginably expensive shawl as a gift, she gave it to her maid. During one argument, he "beat her black and blue." Myshkin is shocked to hear this. Rogozhin says he then threatened to kill himself if she didn't forgive him. When he tells her this, she says he might still manage to kill her before committing suicide himself.

Here Rogozhin describes what would, in the contemporary era, likely be characterized as an abusive relationship. Beyond the horror of Rogozhin's awful treatment of Nastasya, there are two particularly disturbing aspects to this passage. First, Rogozhin seems to have little shame about his treatment of Nastasya, based on the fact that he is willingly telling Myshkin about it. Second, Nastasya herself appears to be aware that Rogozhin is a threat to her life.

Eventually Nastasya agreed to marry him, saying "I'll perish all the same." They set a date, but she once again abandoned him at the altar. When he found her, she said that she wasn't trying to stop their marriage altogether, but just wanted a little more time. Myshkin observes that it would be better for Nastasya to marry anyone except Rogozhin, "because you may put a knife in her." Myshkin says that under different circumstances Rogozhin could have turned out just like his father, confined to a gloomy house with an obedient wife, and trusting no one. Rogozhin says that when Nastasya came to his house and saw his father's portrait, she said the exact same thing.

This passage further emphasizes the idea that Nastasya and Rogozhin's marriage would prove to be a death sentence for Nastasya. Indeed, her insistence that she is not actually trying to cancel the marriage but just delay it so she has a little more time eerily recalls the pleas of Madame du Barry Lebedev discussed earlier in the novel. Nastasya almost appears to accept her "execution" as inevitable, but wants to live a little longer first.

Rogozhin adds that when she visited, Nastasya was very kind to his ill, senile mother. However, he finds it impossible to imagine that their marriage could ever be peaceful. Growing increasingly angry, he says that Nastasya is in love with someone else—Myshkin—but will not marry him because she thinks that doing so would "ruin" him. Myshkin notices a very sharp knife, used to cut pages of books. Rogozhin defensively asks if he's not allowed to have a new knife, and the prince then laughs, blaming his strange behavior on his illness.

In the 19th century, books would come with their pages sealed in pairs, and whoever purchased them would have to slice these pages open with a knife. Of course, Myshkin senses that Rogozhin has a much more sinister purpose in mind with the knife: harming or killing Nastasya.

PART TWO, CHAPTER FOUR

Rogozhin walks Myshkin through the house to leave, and on the way stops in a room full of paintings. One of them is a copy of a painting by Hans Holbein. Rogozhin asks if Myshkin believes in God, and Myshkin comments that the Holbein painting could make a person lose his faith, and Rogozhin replies that this is exactly what has happened. Myshkin grows upset, and bids Rogozhin farewell. Before he goes, Myshkin replies to Rogozhin's question about faith by telling four anecdotes about the power and contradictions of religious belief. One of the stories involves Myshkin buying a cross from a soldier, and Rogozhin asks if Myshkin will give him that cross, saying that Rogozhin will gives his in return.

It is curious that Myshkin seems more upset by his encounter with the Holbein painting than he was to hear about Rogozhin's violent treatment of Nastasya. It's possible that before hearing about Rogozhin's atheism, he did not imagine he would actually be capable of killing Nastasya. Now that Rogozhin has admitted that he has lost his religious faith, Myshkin sees him in a different light.

Myshkin agrees to swap crosses, saying that this will make them "brothers." Rogozhin then takes him inside to a room where his mother is sitting by a fire, dressed all in black. Rogozhin introduces Myshkin as his brother and asks his mother to bless him. Without saying anything, the old woman crosses Myshkin. They leave, and Rogozhin explains that because his mother no longer understands what people say, she must have wanted to bless Myshkin of her own accord. Myshkin then goes to leave and asks to embrace Rogozhin before he does. Rogozhin suddenly becomes angry and cries out: "She's yours! I give her up to you!" He then disappears inside, slamming the door behind him.

Once again, Myshkin has provoked intensely contradictory and conflicted feelings in another character. One minute he is calling Myshkin his "brother" and introducing him to his mother, the next he has an almost violent outburst of jealousy over Nastasya. Perhaps Rogozhin's inclination to "give" Nastasya to Myshkin comes from a genuine place of love, and the belief that Myshkin would be a far better husband for Nastasya than Rogozhin himself would.

PART TWO, CHAPTER FIVE

Myshkin then goes looking for Kolya, who has likely already left for Pavlovsk. Having failed to find his friend, Myshkin wanders around the city for a number of hours, until—at 6 p.m.—he ends up at the train station, buying a ticket to Pavlovsk. He begins thinking about an object he saw in a shop, which he imagined cost about 60 kopeks. Immersed in memories of his illness, he suddenly wonders if he actually walked past the shop and object at all, or if they are products of his imagination. Myshkin returns to the shop and finds the object. He then remembers that it was exactly in this spot that he first felt Rogozhin's eyes on him when he arrived back in St. Petersburg.

Myshkin's actions and experience of the world are taking on an increasingly strange, surreal quality, and this suggests that he might be about to have an epileptic fit. His experiences all seem to be charged with intense symbolic meaning, but it is also difficult to assess if they are really happening, or if they are more like hallucinations.

Myshkin hurries away from the shop and thinks about his illness. Just before having a fit, Myshkin would experience a momentary profound religious ecstasy. He was only able to truly comprehend these moments after they were over. In the midst of them, he would fully grasp that "time shall be no more." It is about 7 p.m., and Myshkin now sits in the Summer Garden. He can feel an epileptic fit coming on, and as he walks through the city, he begins to act more and more strangely. He can't stop thinking about Doktorenko. In the six months since Myshkin first arrived in Russia, he has come to "believe in the Russian soul." His thoughts become more and more confused, mixing up everything he saw and discussed that day.

This passage emphasizes Myshkin's profound sensitivity to the world. Quite ordinary things, like meeting different kinds of people, have a deep and sometimes troubling impact on him. This is arguably because he has so much empathy for others and is able to intuitively understand their suffering. At the same time, the experience of returning to Russia has clearly been overwhelming for Myshkin, particularly now when it is combined with a coming attack of epilepsy.

Myshkin turns back on himself, unable to decide in which direction to walk. His dark thoughts begin to give way to a kind of pure euphoria. He thinks about Nastasya, whom he loves, and blushes. He feels that loving Nastasya "passionately" would be cruel. In despair again, Myshkin thinks about Rogozhin's lost faith and the Holbein painting in his house. Myshkin is at Nastasya's house now, but the woman who answers the door tells him she is in Pavlovsk with Darya. Walking back to his hotel, Myshkin begins to shake, feeling that the same dark eyes are looking at him again. Convinced his and Rogozhin's eyes have met, he begins talking to himself.

Now that he has lost control over his thoughts and actions, Myshkin allows himself to think about Nastasya where before he was largely repressing such thoughts. When he thinks it would be cruel to love Nastasya "passionately," it is unclear whether he means in a sexual way, or in the intense, destructive, and possessive way in which Rogozhin loves her. Indeed, perhaps this latter form of love is somehow inherently mixed up with sexuality in Myshkin's mind.

Back in his hotel, Myshkin keeps seeing dark flashes of a man who seems to be following him. He sees Rogozhin's eyes and "furious smile," and shouts out to him. He then experiences half a second in which "extraordinary *inner* light illuminated his soul," and falls down into an epileptic fit, screaming as it happens. On seeing Myshkin's fit, Rogozhin withdraws the knife that he had been holding, and runs out of the hotel. Convulsing, Myshkin falls down the stairs and injures his head. The hotel servants find him lying in a pool of blood, confused about how he got there and wondering if anyone is to blame.

Myshkin's illness is often presented as a form of vulnerability, but ironically in this scene it is his only form of self-defense against Rogozhin, and actually ends up saving his life. This provides an important lesson about the nature of Myshkin's illness, but also his other forms of weakness, such as his trusting, innocent nature. Although they may appear to make him vulnerable, they are also simultaneously sources of power and strength.

Kolya, who had waiting for Myshkin at the hotel, comes over after hearing all the noise. He arranges for Myshkin to be taken to his room and calls a doctor, who announces that Myshkin's fall has not caused any serious injuries. Once Myshkin is awake, Kolya arranges a carriage to take him to Lebedev, who takes receives him utmost kindness. Three days later they go to Pavlovsk.

At this point in the novel, Myshkin has gathered a particularly loyal selection of friends—not unlike disciples—who support and take care of him, further solidifying his characterization as a Christlike figure.

PART TWO, CHAPTER SIX

Lebedev's dacha is small but pretty. Though he looks fine again, Myshkin is very weak, and is happy to be there. He is grateful that Lebedev's family is there (minus Doktorenko), and is delighted that both Kolya and General Ivolgin come to visit. Ganya also comes, along with Varya and Ptitsyn. Lebedev makes a big show of protecting Myshkin from too much stimulation, until Myshkin insists that he grows bored if he is left alone. In reality, Myshkin is more exasperated by Lebedev's constant attention and control. After discussing General Ivolgin, Lebedev tells Myshkin that "a certain person" says that "she wishes very much to have a secret meeting with you." Myshkin says there is no need for it to be secret, and that he will go visit her himself.

Again, though Lebedev is presented as a highly comic character, it is clear that there is more to him than his foolishness. He genuinely cares for Myshkin, even if he shows it in silly and exaggerated ways. This further emphasizes the idea that even highly imperfect people have goodness within them. Myshkin himself has a special ability to perceive this goodness in others, which is why he ended up becoming so close to someone like Lebedev in the first place.

At that moment Kolya appears, announcing that Mrs. Epanchin and her three daughters have come to visit. Meanwhile, Ptitsyn, Varya, Ganya, and General Ivolgin simultaneously arrive from the other side of the terrace. The Epanchins only very recently learned that Myshkin was in Pavlovsk, and eagerly awaited his visit. When he did not come to visit them, Mrs. Epanchin was angry and hurt. Finally, Kolya came to update them on Myshkin, including his illness, at which point Mrs. Epanchin became terribly worried about him. She tried to call a "medical celebrity" in from St. Petersburg, but her daughters ultimately persuaded her not to do this.

As fervent believers in the importance of social etiquette, the Epanchins assumed that Myshkin was snubbing them even though, given Myshkin's personality, this was highly unlikely. As such, this passage shows how taking etiquette too seriously can override a person's common sense.

When Prince Shch. heard that the Epanchin girls were going to visit Myshkin, he decided to join, too. He'd heard many good things about the prince from the girls, and had eventually realized that he and Myshkin knew each other, as they used to live in the same town. Lebedev's dacha is mere steps away from the Epanchins'. Mrs. Epanchin, who has become convinced that Myshkin is on his deathbed, is annoyed to see Lebedev's house swarming with visitors. She tells Myshkin that she cares about him more than if he was her own son, and was terribly worried about him, and calls Kolya a "malicious brat" for letting her believe that Myshkin was dying.

This passage further emphasizes that Mrs. Epanchin is rather lacking in common sense. She clings to her own ideas about a given situation (such as her belief that Myshkin is on his deathbed) even though the evidence suggests that they are incorrect. Furthermore, she has a tendency to dramatically overexaggerate problems rather than dealing with them in a calm, pragmatic way. This contrasts with Myshkin's own approach to life, as he is much more forgiving and accepting of challenges that arise.

Mrs. Epanchin seems rather horrified that Myshkin is staying at Lebedev's, and offers for him to come and stay at her family's dacha instead. At this moment, Lebedev's grown daughter Vera enters carrying his baby daughter Lyubov, and he theatrically explains that his wife died six weeks ago. Aglaya starts asking Lebedev about his thoughts on the apocalypse, and he answers her with great enthusiasm. General Ivolgin interrupts with a rather silly point, introducing himself to Aglaya, who can hardly stop herself laughing. Ivolgin claims that he used to carry Aglaya in his arms, but Mrs. Epanchin then interrupts to say he's lying. However, Aglaya, Adelaida, and Alexandra all say they remember Ivolgin from their childhood.

Mrs. Epanchin dislikes anything and anyone that doesn't cohere with her rather elitist ideas about how things should be. As a result, she often seems to be in a state of perpetual impatience. In contrast, her daughters have a much more relaxed and open attitude toward those who are different. Their usual reaction to someone or something unusual is to laugh, which—although it might not be the kindest or politest reaction—is probably better than their mother's uptight horror.

Ivolgin tells all young people that he carried them in his arms and thus did not expect to actually be telling the truth this time. Mrs. Epanchin shoos him away, saying she's heard that he has spent time in debtor's prison and that he should think about his sins. However, when Ivolgin glumly departs, she beckons him back, saying: "We're all sinners." After Ganya leaves, Mrs. Epanchin says that he she hardly recognized him, but is suspicious of Myshkin's assertion that he's doing better. Kolya mentions the "poor knight" and *Don Quixote*, which Aglaya has lately been talking about. Kolya says he recently heard Aglaya say that "there is nothing better than 'the poor knight,'" but he doesn't know who she was talking about.

The "poor knight" is the central, eponymous figure in Don Quixote. He is a knight lost in an idealistic fantasy world, yet who is nonetheless a highly noble character. Don Quixote is one of the literary figures that inspired the development of Myshkin, and it is clear that Aglaya's fixation on "the poor knight" betrays a special interest in the prince.

Aglaya is furious, but Kolya continues, saying that Aglaya asked Adelaida to draw a portrait of the poor knight, but Adelaida didn't because she didn't know what to draw. Aglaya eventually explains that she admires the poor knight, who is depicted in a recent Russian poem by Pushkin, because he exemplifies a man who devotes his own life to a single ideal. She goes on to explain that the knight doesn't mind who his lady is, but will love her with total and unconditional love no matter what she is like. Initially she could not understand him, but now she "love[s] the 'poor knight' and, above all, respect[s] his deeds." Mrs. Epanchin demands that Aglaya recite the poem. Aglaya agrees but, just as she is about to start, her father arrives with a young man.

Importantly, Aglaya's fascination with the poor knight does not originate in the original 15th-century book by Miguel de Cervantes, but rather in a more contemporary poem by Pushkin, which transposes the Don Quixote figure into a Russian context. Clearly, there are parallels between the "poor knight" (as she describes him) and Myshkin. Both are totally open about who they love, but once they love someone, they are totally devoted to that person. This combination of intensity and openness is an example of the Christlike love that Myshkin embodies throughout the story.

PART TWO, CHAPTER SEVEN

The young man accompanying General Epanchin is 28 and handsome, with dark, witty eyes. Aglaya ignores both of them and recites the poem anyway. Myshkin correctly guesses that the young man is Evgeny. Aglaya, meanwhile, gives a grave and dramatic performance of the poem, even descending into a "rapture." The poem ends with the poor knight dying alone as a "recluse." During her recital, Aglaya changes the initials of the knight's love from A.M.D. to N.F.B., and this horrifies the prince. Most of those present do not notice the change, but Myshkin is convinced that Evgeny Pavlovich has.

Aglaya evidently shares her mother's flair for drama. At times, her flamboyant nature emerges at the expense of others, for example when she here changes the initials of the knight's lady to be those of Nastasya. Not only is Myshkin frightened of Nastasya, but he becomes embarrassed of any mention of his feelings about her. Yet Aglaya seems particularly interested in these feelings, and willing to exploit them for the purpose of entertainment here.

After the conversation about the poem ends and the new guest is introduced, Evgeny announces that he is temporarily resigning from the military. Myshkin feels uneasy. Evgeny brings up Pushkin again, and Vera soon appears holding the Lebedev family's copy of Pushkin's poetry, which she presents to Mrs. Epanchin. Vera then turns to Myshkin and tells him that four men came by to see him earlier, adding that they are angry. Ganya and Ptitsyn are currently "trying to talk sense into them," but they demand to see the prince. Lebedev mentions that it's Pavlishchev's son and some others, and Myshkin immediately becomes alarmed.

The arrival of these four angry men would perhaps, in another context, suggest that there is something Myshkin has been hiding from everyone—after all, why else would the men be there? However, it is difficult to imagine that the morally upright Myshkin has any kind of dark secret that has caused people to be angry with him.

Everyone is caught up in the conversation now, and Aglaya warns Myshkin that he should speak to the men now, because they are trying to "besmirch" him. Someone asks if the young men are nihilists, and Lebedev comments that "they've gone further than the nihilists" because they actually act on their beliefs. The one claiming to be Pavlishchev's son is actually named is Antip Burdovsky, and he is about 22 years old, with a speech defect. The next of the four is Ippolit, whose illness has made him skeletal, and who probably has only a few weeks to live. The other two are Lebedev's nephew Vladimir Doktorenko and Keller. It appears that in introducing themselves, they have deliberately mixed up their names.

Although there have been a couple of passing references to nihilism in the book thus far, this is the first time that the reader actually encounters characters with nihilist beliefs. It is clear from the way that the other characters react to their presence that they are afraid of nihilism. This fear perhaps less lies in nihilism as an ideology and more in how it makes people act—as revealed when Lebedev argues that these young nihilists have gone further than most, by putting their beliefs into practice.

PART TWO, CHAPTER EIGHT

Myshkin tells the four men that he was not expecting to see them, that he has been sick, and that he'd hoped they had been able to sort out the business via Ganya. The men grumble indignantly in response. Burdovsky shouts at Myshkin: "You have no right!" At this moment, Mrs. Epanchin demands that the prince read a newspaper article which she promises is relevant to his current situation. While Myshkin tries to assure her that he will read it by himself later, Mrs. Epanchin insists that he read it immediately, aloud. The article is emblazoned with a headline that reads: "Proletarians and Scions, an Episode from Daily and Everyday Robberies! Progress! Reform! Justice!"

Although the entrance of Myshkin's accusers is clearly sinister and alarming, the whole episode also has a comic quality throughout. This is shown, for example, in the headline and its many exclamation marks. The headline presents nihilism as something concerned with worthy ideals (such as "progress" and "justice") but in a haphazard, somewhat hysterical and ridiculous way.

The article describes an unnamed man, obviously Myshkin, returning to Russia from Switzerland, where he was being treated for "idiocy." It states that Myshkin was sponsored by a rich landowner named P.—— (Pavlishchev). The article asserts that P.—— was foolish to believe that "the idiot could be taught reason in Switzerland." After five years in Switzerland, Myshkin "began to resemble a human being—only just, no doubt." During this time, P.—— died. According to the article, Myshkin managed to swindle the professor, and then ended up swindling his way into inheriting P.——'s fortune. At this point, General Epanchin cries out in protest, but Mrs. Epanchin insists they listen to the end.

To those who know Myshkin, the article is obviously an example of slander and unbearable cruelty. This emerges especially through the dehumanizing language that the writer uses to describe Myshkin's illness. In a sense, whoever wrote the article sabotaged themselves by including such unnecessarily cruel and belittling rhetoric, because it makes Myshkin seem less like a wicked perpetrator of wrong, and more like a victim.

The article continues that P.—— has an illegitimate son, a young man who does not have the same last name as his father. The son was raised by his mother and stepfather, a nobleman, as if he was his stepfather's own child. The article raises the question of what Myshkin should do with this information. It suggests that surely Myshkin should give the son the thousands spent on his treatment in Switzerland. In reality, though, Myshkin has only sent the young man 50 roubles. The article ends with a comical, rhyming epigram making fun of Myshkin and accusing him of committing theft.

As has been made clear thus far, biological ties are extremely meaningful in the world of the novel. A person's whole life can change in an instant because they inherit a fortune from someone they are related to (even if only very distantly). The question of "illegitimate" children makes this whole issue more complicated, but the article insists that Pavlishchev's son has a right to his fortune despite this.

Kolya, who has been reading the article aloud to everyone, flees to a corner and puts his face in his hands. The other guests all feel very embarrassed. Strangely, even the four young men seem to be unhappy. General Epanchin grumbles that the article was written by imbeciles. Finally, Myshkin speaks, saying that he doesn't "mind" the article, but adds that whoever wrote it must know it is wrong. The four young men immediately distance themselves from the article. Lebedev's nephew, Doktorenko, begins shouting that the issue they are presenting may not be a legal one, but it is one that demands attention based on human conscience and common sense. He repeats that they "demand, and do not ask."

Myshkin's phrasing of his objection to the article is key. Rather than defensively declaring it is wrong, he points out that whoever wrote it knows it is wrong. This betrays Myshkin's serene sense of goodness and justice. He does not think about himself and his ego, but rather immediately places himself in the shoes of the writer. This causes him to wonder how and why the writer composed an article they knew was false.

Burdovsky repeats the word "demand," turning bright red. Although Lebedev supports Myshkin in this whole affair, he feels a bit of "family pride" after Doktorenko's speech. When Myshkin begins to speak about the "slander" in the article, Ippolit goes flustered and insists that it was Keller who wrote it. Keller confirms that he wrote it, though he adds that he showed it to Burdovsky, who approved it before publication. Myshkin points out that the men published the article based on their certainty that Myshkin would never give in to Burdovsky's demands. In fact, Myshkin may well do so. Although Myshkin is speaking in a calm and friendly way, each thing he says makes the men more and more irate.

The young nihilists are comic characters, utter fools who take themselves so seriously that they end up becoming even more amusing. Indeed, while they might have succeeded in attempting to swindle a less pure, open-hearted person, Myshkin's innocent nature mean that all their tricks immediately unravel. This is why they get so furious in the face of Myshkin's calm behavior.

Myshkin objects less to how he was portrayed in the article, and more about the "slander" directed toward others. Myshkin explains that he found it hard to believe that Burdovsky would reveal his mother's shameful secret (that his stepfather was not actually his real father). He thus concluded that Burdovsky "must be a simple, defenseless man" who was put up to getting money from Myshkin by someone else. He has calculated that Pavlishchev must have spent about 10,000 roubles on his treatment, and thus plans to give this money directly to Burdovsky. After hearing this, Ippolit cries out indignantly: "Only ten thousand!" Burdovsky himself refuses the offer.

It might at first seem that Myshkin is being absurdly kind to people who are quite openly trying to rob him. However, the strategy of kindness has actually proven to be the best way to disarm the young group of nihilists (although of course Myshkin is not employing it strategically—this is just his nature). With every act of kindness that they scorn, the nihilists place themselves more and more obviously in the wrong.

Myshkin goes on to explain that the article's claim that he inherited millions is false; in reality, he only got a tiny fraction of that. Furthermore, 10,000 roubles is actually far more than Pavlishchev ever spent on him, as Schneider only charged 600 roubles a year. He believes that Burdovsky is innocent, and that Chebarov, his lawyer, has "duped" him (and the other men) into believing that he is Pavlishchev's son.

It is not clear whether Myshkin actually believes that Burdovsky has been tricked by Chebarov, or whether he is trying to offer Burdovsky a way out in order to avoid being humiliated in front of everyone. Either way, this act comes from a place of kind-hearted generosity.

Despite his conviction that Burdovsky is not Pavlishchev's son, Myshkin will give him the 10,000 roubles anyway, as he had been planning to use this to set up a school in Pavlishchev's memory. He argues that, in a sense, Burdovsky might as well be Pavlishchev's son, because he is an innocent man who has been cruelly swindled into believing this lie about this paternity. After making this speech, Myshkin regrets having done everything in such a public manner and feels bad about implying that Burdovsky is also perceived by others as an idiot.

Despite the totally unwarranted kindness Myshkin has shown the young nihilists, he still feels guilty for having embarrassed them by conducting the whole affair in public—even though it was them who stormed in and demanded to speak to him, and even published an article about him in the newspaper. Myshkin's empathy and kindness do perhaps sometimes border on self-destructive foolishness.

PART TWO, CHAPTER NINE

At Myshkin's request, Ganya takes over the negotiations. He begins by pointing out that Burdovsky has lied about his own date of birth in Keller's article. He then gives additional evidence that irrefutably disproves Burdovsky's claim to be Pavlishchev's son. Burdovsky immediately claims he was "deceived" long before he event met Chebarov, and immediately says he no longer wants any money from Myshkin. He tries to leave, but Ganya insists he stay to hear about a few more important matters. He notes that Burdovsky's mother never had a sexual relationship with Pavlishchev. Rather, Pavlishchev knew her as a child and helped support her financially, because she was the younger sister of a woman Pavlishchev loved and hoped to marry, but who died unexpectedly.

Unlike Myshkin, Ganya is not afraid to expose the young nihilists as vindictive frauds. It turns out that Ganya already has all the information about how the nihilists falsified their claims, and that Myshkin thus likely knew all along, too. Any other person in Myshkin's position would undoubtedly have wanted to publicly humiliate the people who he knew had constructed an elaborate scheme to slander and rob him. However, because Myshkin is so good, he had no such desire.

Ganya also found that Burdovsky's father (who he claimed was his stepfather) drank away the money he gained from Burdovsky's mother's dowry, leaving the family "destitute." As Ganya speaks, Doktorenko and Ippolit grow still more furious, demanding that he stop reciting this "novel." Yet Ganya continues, concluding with the information that while Chebarov did hope to make money out of this situation, he is not a thief or a crook. Meanwhile, Burdovsky is a "pure man" who will perhaps help Myshkin in setting up the school. Burdovsky yells that he doesn't want the money and throws back the 250 roubles Myshkin initially gave him (which was listed incorrectly in the article as 50).

It is quite obvious from what Ganya has said that Burdovsky is decidedly not a "pure man" whose involvement in the whole affair was some kind of accident. However, as we saw earlier, it is more effective to pursue this line of argument than to portray Burdovsky as a perpetrator who knew what he was doing all along. By refusing to take an aggressive line of argument, Myshkin and Ganya make themselves irreproachable.

Myshkin, now quite distraught, says he is to blame for everything. At this point the Epanchin women speak up, claiming the dacha has come to resemble a "madhouse." Ganya points out that there are only 100 roubles in the packet Burdovsky gave back. Doktorenko at first insists that it's "all the same," but after Ganya disagrees, he says that the other 150 were used to pay Chebarov's travel expenses. Mrs. Epanchin interrupts and begins shouting at everyone. Several people try to calm her, and Prince Shch. kindly suggests they go home, but she continues to yell, accusing everyone of various misdeeds. She accuses the young men of being atheists who have been "eaten up by vanity and pride." She then points to Ippolit and accuses him of corrupting Kolya.

Mrs. Epanchin's outburst is typical of her melodramatic nature and tendency to exaggerate her problems, particularly when they involve any kind of public scandal. However, Myshkin is overreacting, too, albeit for different reasons. While the whole affair has actually been resolved with minimal issues—most importantly, Myshkin has cleared his name—he still panics over the fact that he has caused embarrassment, even though clearly he is not actually the one at fault.

On seeing that Ippolit is grinning at her, Mrs. Epanchin runs up to him and grabs him by the arm, at which point he is overcome by a coughing fit. He tells her that he'll be dead within two weeks. Mrs. Epanchin tells him to lie down, but he says as soon as he does that he will be dead. She then gets him a chair. Ippolit tells Mrs. Epanchin that he'd heard from Kolya that she was an "eccentric woman," and had thus hoped to meet her. Prompted by Ippolit, Myshkin invites everyone to stay for tea, and the scene unexpectedly becomes quite friendly and pleasant.

There is an interesting connection between the way in which both Myshkin and Ippolit's illnesses have the effect of disarming someone being aggressive to them, hearkening back to Myshkin's epileptic seizure in Part 2, Chapter 5. While Mrs. Epanchin's grabbing of Ippolit's arm is of course an extremely mild act compared to Rogozhin's attempt to stab Myshkin, both scenes are connected through their presentation of illness as an unlikely form of self-defense.

PART TWO, CHAPTER TEN

During the conversation over tea, Mrs. Epanchin tells Myshkin that she's just heard Lebedev "corrected" the article about him. Lebedev admits it's true, explaining "I'm mean," and Mrs. Epanchin urges Myshkin not to forgive him. Keller jumps in to confirm that Lebedev did correct it, but Lebedev then notes that he only corrected the first half of the article, and left the second half as it was. Ippolit now says that he purposefully mentioned the correction because he knew it would infuriate Mrs. Epanchin, and he wanted to see her reaction. As an argument begins to erupt again, General Epanchin and Aglaya urge Mrs. Epanchin to come home with them immediately, but she insists that Myshkin is clearly ill and must come with them.

Lebedev has now become one of Myshkin's close friends and has shown his support, particularly in the wake of his most recent epileptic fit. The fact that he "corrected" the article thus amounts to a hurtful betrayal. Perhaps he did so out of the same sense of family loyalty that caused him to be proud when Doktorenko gave his speech. Alternatively, perhaps Lebedev is ultimately a foolish, unreliable, and duplicitous person even if there is also some good within him.

Ippolit turns to Evgeny and demands to know why Evgeny has laughed at him every time he's spoken. Evgeny asks if Ippolit really thinks he can persuade everyone to agree with him after speaking to them for only 15 minutes. At first unsure, Ippolit decisively confirms that he believes this. Evgeny notes that the ideology of Ippolit and his friends seems to revolve entirely around "the right of force." Ippolit at first denies this, but while Evgeny continues to explain what he means, Ippolit stops listening. It is clear that Ippolit spends much of his time in a "delirium," not fully conscious of the world around him, and only has moments of full awareness.

Ippolit's delirium is a product of the fact that he is suffering from late-stage tuberculosis. However, it also an essential part of the novel's skeptical portrayal of nihilism. Ippolit's inability (and perhaps also unwillingness) to listen to Evgeny indicates that nihilism is a narrow-minded ideology, one that shuts a person off from other views. Being caught up in nihilist belief is akin to being caught in the kind of delirium produced by Ippolit's illness.

Ippolit suddenly bids everyone farewell and invites them to his funeral. Mrs. Epanchin takes his arm, and in a rambling speech, he tells her that above all she is frightened of the "sincerity" shown by him and his comrades. Mrs. Epanchin comments that Ippolit is delirious; she tearfully promises that they will send for a new doctor for him tomorrow. Ippolit, meanwhile, repeatedly assures her that he hasn't corrupted Kolya, before proceeding with a rather nonsensical rant, interspersed with demands that people stop laughing at him. Eventually he collapses into a chair and sobs with his face in his hands. Mrs. Epanchin comforts him.

When Mrs. Epanchin mentions that she fears the "sincerity" of the young nihilists, perhaps she means that the conviction with which they put their beliefs into practice is alarming, because its consequences are potentially dangerous. On the other hand, there is perhaps an extent to which sincerity is in itself off-putting to a high society woman like Epanchin. In a superficial world of polite detachment, any earnest conviction seems out of place.

The group discusses what should be done with Ippolit, and Myshkin offers for him and his friends to stay at Lebedev's. Now Mrs. Epanchin demands to know if Myshkin himself is sick or not. At this moment, Ippolit stands and staggers toward the door, where Burdovsky and Doktorenko are standing. Myshkin says he feared this would happen, and Ippolit screams that he hates everyone there, but hates Myshkin most of all. He curses them all. General and Mrs. Epanchin sarcastically thank Myshkin for such a wonderful visit; Adelaida takes Myshkin's hand sympathetically, but Aglaya hisses at him that if he doesn't "drop these loathsome people," she will hate him forever. She leaves without saying goodbye, along with the rest of her family.

Likely because they are so overly attached to notions of propriety, General Epanchin and Mrs. Epanchin both blame Myshkin for everything that went wrong that day even though it is quite obviously not his fault. Aglaya does not have the same obsession with "proper" ways of being, but does appear to have inherited her mother's trait of feeling quite horrified when things do not go the way she wants them to. As a result, she coldly punishes Myshkin for the days' events, too.

On the way out, the Epanchins, Prince Shch., and Evgeny come across two "magnificent" women riding in a carriage. One of them (Nastasya) calls out to Evgeny, addressing him affectionately, and mentions Rogozhin. Before she rides away, she says: "See you tomorrow!" Evgeny claims to have no idea who he is, and goes back to Myshkin to ask for an explanation. However, the prince weakly assures him that he doesn't know anything about it himself.

Even when she is being friendly, Nastasya's presence alone can send chills up the spines of the other characters. They all fear her scheming and power, and are desperate to remain uninvolved with it.

PART TWO, CHAPTER ELEVEN

Myshkin spends the next three days glumly reflecting on what happened during his disastrous soiree. The day after it happened, Adelaida and Prince Shch. came to visit him to check on his health. They go on a walk, and overall the visit is very pleasant, though none of them discuss Mrs. Epanchin, Aglaya, or what happened the day before. Just before they go, Prince Shch. asks who the woman was who shouted to Evgeny from the carriage; Myshkin replies that it was Nastasya. Prince Shch. adds that he's confused, because Nastasya mentioned "promissory notes of Evgeny Pavlych's" that Rogozhin will apparently let slide for a while. This is very perplexing, as Evgeny is now extremely wealthy, although it's true that in the past he borrowed money.

A "promissory note" is a legally binding note in which one person promises to pay a certain amount of money to another. The fact that Evgeny has written one (or more) of these notes to Rogozhin is scandalous, to the point that Prince Shch. is either unwilling or unable to believe that it is even true.

Prince Shch. was hoping Myshkin would have some insight, but Myshkin admits he doesn't. He and Adelaida depart. Myshkin is troubled, but briefly distracted by conversations with Lebedev's children. His affection for them has grown immensely. Myshkin and Ganya have also become very close; yet although Myshkin trusts Ganya completely, there are still certain topics that they have both decided not to mention. Now Ganya tells him that Nastasya has only been in Pavlovsk four days but is already the center of attention. She is staying in a small house with Darya, and riding around in the best carriage in the area. Countless men have already fallen in love with her, causing a great deal of drama.

It is obvious that Myshkin has forgiven both Lebedev and Ganya for the ways they have harmed him earlier, although the fact that Myshkin does not totally trust Ganya indicates that his ability to assess people's trustworthiness and act accordingly may be improving. Meanwhile, Nastasya's purpose in Pavlovsk seems to be to cause as much chaos as possible.

Nastasya often goes on carriage rides with a distant relation of Darya's, a beautiful 16-year-old girl. Discussing Evgeny, Ganya notes that although he is rich, it is known that his estate is struck by "disorder." Varya comes by, and mentions that Evgeny is in St. Petersburg, as is Ptitsyn. Something has happened in the city, though she doesn't say what. She also mentions that Mrs. Epanchin is in a terrible mood and that Aglaya has had a fight with the whole rest of her family. Ganya and Varya then both leave.

Many of the characters in the novel, including Aglaya, Ganya, and Kolya, have rebellious and combative attitudes toward their own families. Particularly in Aglaya's case, this seems to be related to the fact that she is the youngest and seemingly still more childlike than her two older sisters.

Now alone, Myshkin is troubled by this news. That evening, Keller comes to Lebedev's house, wanting to tell Myshkin his "whole life's story." Myshkin indicates that it might be better if he didn't, but Keller insists. Keller comments that Myshkin's view of the world is "bright and innocent, and eve [...] pastoral!" Growing annoyed, Myshkin asks why Keller is there, wondering if it is to borrow money. Keller is stunned—this *is* the ultimate reason he came, and he is astonished that Myshkin somehow managed to know that. He goes on to explain that his decision to confess his life story to Myshkin coincided with the idea of borrowing money from him, and Myshkin replies that he finds that such "double thoughts" are common, and that he's experienced them himself.

This is one of the clearest examples in the novel of Myshkin's sharp insight into the psychology and behavior of other people. While at times Myshkin can indeed appear foolish and naïve, exchanges like this one with Keller show that he is also extremely incisive. It is especially curious that this insight into the weaknesses of humanity coincides with Myshkin's absolute, nonjudgmental love for other people.

Keller says he is shocked that anyone calls Myshkin an idiot. Lebedev enters, and Myshkin asks him about his involvement in the whole affair regarding Evgeny. He asks Lebedev to tell the truth, but as soon as Lebedev begins to do so, starting with the words "Aglaya Ivanovna," Myshkin goes bright red and tells him to shut up. Later that night, Kolya comes with a great deal of news. He has just returned from St. Petersburg and went straight to the Epanchins', where a disastrous situation is unfolding. Apparently, Aglaya has been fighting with her family about Ganya, although Kolya doesn't know exactly what happened. Shortly after, Mrs. Epanchin threw Varya out of the house without her daughters knowing.

It is unclear how or why Aglaya would be involved with Lebedev's connection to Evgeny, except for the fact that Evgeny has his eye on her and wants to propose to her. The more important aspect of this passage is that Myshkin blushes just from hearing Lebedev say Aglaya's name (and perhaps also due to being reminded of Evgeny's interest in her). This is a strong indication that Myshkin may have fallen in love with Aglaya.

Myshkin observes that perhaps these stories indicate that Ganya's hopes of marrying Aglaya may be fulfilled after all, and Kolya calls him "a terrible skeptic." However, Kolya then excitedly accuses Myshkin of being jealous, and bursts out laughing. He stops when he sees how upset this has made Myshkin.

Myshkin's observation here lies on the fact that if Evgeny is caught up in some kind of unseemly financial scandal involving Rogozhin, this will disqualify him as a suitor for Aglaya.

The next morning Myshkin goes to St. Petersburg, but is back in Pavlovsk by late afternoon. He runs into General Epanchin at the station, and they talk on the train. The general glumly describes his home life as "hell," and goes on a long, confused, and mostly nonsensical ramble about Nastasya, Evgeny, Mrs. Epanchin, and the prince himself. This conversation lasts for the whole train ride, during which General Epanchin emphasizes that he doesn't "suspect" Myshkin of anything. He mentions Evgeny's uncle, a rich and lively 70-year-old who once had his eye on Nastasya, and notes that when the uncle dies, Evgeny will inherit everything.

Again, we are reminded of how much in the characters' lives depends on the deaths and subsequent inheritances provided by often quite random and distant family members. With changes in fortune constantly taking place in the blink of an eye, it is little wonder that an atmosphere of fast-paced chaos and uncertainty defines the social world of the novel.

PART TWO, CHAPTER TWELVE

At 7 p.m., three days after the soiree, Mrs. Epanchin comes to the terrace of Lebedev's house and immediately tells Myshkin that she has not come to ask for forgiveness because he is entirely to blame. She asks if he sent Aglaya a letter a few months ago, and then demands to see it. Myshkin, who is blushing, says that he doesn't have the letter but can recite it from memory. Mrs. Epanchin asks if he is in love with Aglaya, but Myshkin assures her that he wrote it "as a brother." She then asks him about the "poor knight," which Myshkin cannot explain. Mrs. Epanchin says Aglaya called Myshkin a "little freak" and an "idiot." When Myshkin expresses his hurt, she accuses Aglaya of being "a despotic, crazy, spoiled girl."

Mrs. Epanchin is cruel and unreasonable here. She wants to blame Myshkin for all kinds of things that are not his fault, including Aglaya's evident attachment to him. Her irrationality even goes so far that she demands to see a letter that Myshkin sent to Aglaya (and which he would therefore not still have in his possession). Clearly, when Mrs. Epanchin feels out of control, she blames others in a rather rash and haphazard way.

Mrs. Epanchin then makes Myshkin promise he's not married to "*that one*" (Nastasya). Finally satisfied, she tells Myshkin that Aglaya doesn't love him. She then tells him that she believes God sent him to them "as a friend and a true brother." Mrs. Epanchin then turns to discussing Ganya. She believes that Varya has ingratiated herself to the Epanchin family in order to facilitate a marriage between Aglaya and Ganya. She then accuses Ganya of manipulating and deceiving Myshkin, and of introducing Aglaya and Nastasya. Myshkin is so shocked by this last idea that he leaps up from his chair.

The way Mrs. Epanchin treats Myshkin suggests that she forgets, or is not able to actually understand, that he is a person with feelings of his own. This is perhaps because of his otherworldly purity and willingness to forgive, which makes him repeatedly accept bad treatment from other people. It is also perhaps because she sees him as an "idiot," someone with reduced capacities due to his illness, and therefore finds it easy to take advantage of him.

Mrs. Epanchin tells Myshkin she's sure he begged Burdovsky to accept the 10,000 roubles, which Myshkin promises he didn't. She then shows Myshkin a letter from Burdovsky in which he states that Myshkin is better than most men, and promises that he will eventually pay the 250 roubles back. Myshkin is pleased by the apology, but Mrs. Epanchin remains horrified. She bans Myshkin from visiting their house, but Myshkin informs her he's already *been* banned—by Aglaya. He shows a bamboozled Mrs. Epanchin a letter from Aglaya indicating that she does not want to see him. Mrs. Epanchin thinks for a moment, then grabs Myshkin's arm and drags him toward her house, saying that Aglaya needs a "buffoon" like him.

Once again, the parallels between Mrs. Epanchin and Aglaya are emphasized by the fact that they are actually committing the exact same acts without even realizing it. Both have a similarly contradictory relationship to Myshkin. They love him yet are constantly declaring their hatred of him, and dismiss him, even as it is clear that his actions have a great impact on them.

PART THREE, CHAPTER ONE

The narrator states that everyone complains that there are no "practical" people in Russia. Inventors and geniuses tend to be perceived as "fools," and parents are likely to wish for a more conventional life than a life led by a genius. The narrator then turns to discussing the Epanchins, who suffer from the misguided belief that other families are not as dysfunctional as they are. Recently Mrs. Epanchin has come to blame herself for everything that is going wrong in her family. This in turn makes her feel even worse. In reality, the Epanchins are a widely respected family. People think highly of both General Epanchin and his wife, although Mrs. Epanchin remains crippled by insecurity.

The narrator's observation that geniuses tend to be perceived as fools obviously relates to the misguided way in which people perceive Myshkin. While Myshkin is not a genius in the sense of being a great scientist or inventor, his insight into human psychology and innovative way of being arguably make him a genius of some kind.

Mrs. Epanchin loves her daughters, but she is convinced that it is her fault that they are not married yet. She is also worried about her daughters becoming nihilists, and feels suspicious about how they have reacted to "the woman question," including by cutting off their long hair. She finds some peace in the knowledge that Adelaida will soon be married, yet remains worried about the other two, and especially Aglaya. Meanwhile, she wonders if Alexandra, who is now 25, is "a nihilist, or simply a fool." Still, as Adelaida's wedding approaches, Mrs. Epanchin gets a break from her troubles. Meanwhile, everyone has been discussing how beautiful and charming Aglaya is. Yet Mrs. Epanchin remains seriously worried that Myshkin is going to ruin everything.

Mrs. Epanchin's concerns about nihilism and "the woman question" highlight a generational divide in Russia at this time. Nihilism is a form of rebellion against existing social norms and structures, including strict gender roles. For this reason, it appeals to young women, and is related to what Mrs. Epanchin calls "the woman question", which today readers can interpret to be an early form of feminism. Because her daughters are more rebellious and critical of the strict roles assigned to them, Mrs. Epanchin feels she doesn't understand them.

To her horror, Mrs. Epanchin received an anonymous letter about Nastasya "being in touch with" Aglaya. She remains terrified that Aglaya might be in love with Myshkin. Currently, the Epanchins are sitting with Evgeny, Prince Shch., and Myshkin; everyone is there except General Epanchin, who is still in St. Petersburg. Kolya arrives. An argument is taking place, and there is tension among the group. Evgeny blusters that he is not critiquing liberalism in general, but rather Russian liberalism, which is inherently of a non-Russian character. He even goes on to say that Russian literature is non-Russian, although he excludes certain writers, including Pushkin and Gogol.

During this time, there were tensions between certain forms of cultural patriotism and a more pro-European position. Some Russians embraced the influence of Western European culture, whereas others believed that it was vitally important that Russia returned to its own unique culture. Evgeny appears to be taking the latter view by positioning liberalism as an ideology that is inherently anti-Russian.

Evgeny notes that the conversation began with socialists, and his assertion that "we don't have a single Russian socialist." He argues that the supposed socialists that exist in Russia are actually liberals, all of whom come from the landowning or clerical classes. Everyone laughs, and Myshkin remarks that he doesn't have a position regarding Evgeny's argument but is enjoying listening to it. Evgeny continues, establishing that liberalism is necessarily an "attack on the existing order of things." He argues that Russian liberalism goes further, as it is attack on not just the order but "the things themselves," including the actual nation of Russia. For this reason, Russian liberals usually hate their country and its customs.

From a contemporary perspective, it is strange and almost amusing to read Evgeny's claim that Russian socialists cannot exist, and that socialism is somehow incompatible with Russia. However, there is some truth in what he is saying, in the sense that some people would argue that socialism cannot coexist with any form of patriotism, Russian or otherwise. Under this view, socialism is always an inherently internationalist project, with no interest in national boundaries.

Evgeny argues that patriotism is actually stigmatized among liberals. Myshkin comments that Evgeny is surely correct to some degree, but that his opinion likely only tells part of the story. Evgeny tells a story about a defense attorney who claimed that his client's poverty made it natural or inevitable for him to kill six people. He asks the prince about this case, and Myshkin replies, not realizing that Evgeny is joking. Everyone laughs at him. However, when Myshkin starts talking properly, everyone stops laughing and listens intently.

By taking Evgeny literally, Myshkin arguably betrays sympathy for the line of argument that poverty can cause people to commit crimes (even as he might not entirely agree with the attorney's rather extreme argument). This is a highly progressive and, some would argue, truly Christian view.

Myshkin says that he has spent time in prisons and become "acquainted" with criminals. He notes that there is a stark difference between those who are aware that they have done wrong and those who don't see themselves as wrongdoers. This latter category is always made up of young people who have fallen "under the influence of perverse ideas." Evgeny points out that Burdovsky surely falls into this category, but Mrs. Epanchin interjects to say that Burdovsky recently apologized and now "believes more in the prince." Kolya then informs everyone that Ippolit has moved into Lebedev's dacha on Myshkin's invitation. Myshkin reprimands Kolya for telling the others this.

One aspect of the social world in The Idiot *that is particularly remarkable (and perhaps unusual from a contemporary perspective) is the extent to which the characters believe that ideology holds incredible power. Often, when a character acts in a certain way, their actions are explained by the ideology to which they subscribe (e.g. nihilism, patriotism, atheism, "the woman question," etc.). This could imply that, as a reaction to the shifting culture in Russia, characters are eager to adopt a belief system that allows them to feel a sense of certainty and belonging in lieu of a strong national identity.*

Kolya says that Ippolit's health is better than it's been in months, but the other still express their disapproval of him staying with Myshkin. Annoyed, Myshkin tells them that they should forgive Ippolit because he is about to die. He also indicates that they should seek Ippolit's forgiveness themselves. When Evgeny objects that he never harmed Ippolit, Myshkin laments that he doesn't understand. Mrs. Epanchin loudly insists that they all go listen to music before another argument begins.

For Myshkin, forgiveness is not a single, particular transaction intended to make up for any specific wrongdoing. Rather, it is a principle and orientation through which he relates to the whole world. In Myshkin's view, everyone always needs to be forgiving each other and seeking the forgiveness of others.

PART THREE, CHAPTER TWO

Myshkin takes Evgeny's arm and assures him that he thinks he is "the noblest and best of men." Surprised, Evgeny almost bursts out laughing. He admits feeling deeply ashamed of what happened three days ago, which he believes is his fault. Mrs. Epanchin asks if Myshkin is about to have a fit, but he says he isn't. He notes that his illness has made him "superfluous in society." He knows that his strange behavior makes people laugh, although he also knows that he is loved by the Epanchins. At this moment Aglaya furiously bursts out that her family members do not deserve such kindness. She demands to know why Myshkin abases himself like this.

It seems that regardless of whether Aglaya believes Myshkin is being too kind to her family or not kind enough, she feels outraged with him. This could simply be a product of her immaturity and hot temper. In addition, however, it could also indicate that she is in love with him. It might be for this reason that everything Myshkin does is charged with so much agonizing meaning for her.

Kolya suddenly shouts: "The poor knight!" Addressing Myshkin, Aglaya shouts that she will never marry him, "a ridiculous man." Myshkin points out that he hasn't actually asked her to marry him. He approaches her, and she bursts out laughing. Everyone laughs too, including Myshkin. Adelaida suggests that they all go for a walk, and calls Myshkin "a dear man." Aglaya jokes about Myshkin having "rejected" her and keeps laughing as she babbles. They walk to the Pavlovsk vauxhall, which during the week is filled with a more elite crowd than it is on weekends. Some people come to hear the music played there, but many come to survey the rest of the crowd.

Perhaps because they don't really know how to handle the unexpected impact of Myshkin's presence in their lives, the Epanchins and their friends frequently fall into random bursts of laughter, which often occur at rather inappropriate times. These bursts of laughter clearly serve a cathartic purpose, and also act as reminders of the absurdity of life.

On this particular evening, the Epanchins and their friends are very pleased by the music. They chat with various people, though Myshkin struggles to conform to the social etiquette required of him. He longs to be back in the solitude of the Swiss mountains. He finds himself staring at Aglaya's face, until she tells him it's creeping her out. She whispers to herself, "Idiot!" Alexandra murmurs to Mrs. Epanchin that Aglaya seems to be joking with Myshkin, but that she has taken the joke too far and must be stopped. Myshkin suddenly jumps, because he has seen Nastasya and Rogozhin in the crowd. A noisy group of about ten people then emerges near to the Epanchin group. Some of them are dressed in expensive fashions, but others look decidedly strange.

Given the chaotic nature of the world of the novel, a scene like the vauxhall—which is both filled with a great many important, elite people and requires a very particular, strict mode of behavior—seems bound to end in some kind of scandal. Already, the emotions and dynamics of the Epanchins and their friends are charged, as shown by the fact that Aglaya keeps teasing Myshkin in a way that becomes more and more cruel.

Myshkin hasn't seen Nastasya for three months. He has been meaning to visit her but has not been able to bring himself to do so. He suddenly feels convinced that Nastasya is "mad." At this moment, Nastasya sees Evgeny and comes over, saying she's been unable to find him despite sending several messengers. In a strangely jolly way, she tells him that his uncle was involved in a scandal involving 350,000 roubles of missing government money, and that he has just shot himself. She says it's a shame because she was relying on Evgeny inheriting his uncle's fortune. She bids him farewell, and as she goes insists that Evgeny knew about his uncle's corruption before he died.

This scene confirms that Nastasya's entire purpose in life seems to turn other people's worlds upside down and cause as much drama as possible. It is not clear at this point what her motivation is for hurting Evgeny in this way, or if she even has one at all beyond causing scandal. Either way, here she confirms her status as a force of pure destruction.

Evgeny goes white; the Epanchin women immediately go to leave, but at this moment Evgeny's friend, an officer, tells Nastasya that she should be whipped. Nastasya grabs a riding crop from the hands of someone standing nearby and whacks the officer with it. The officer lunges toward her, but Myshkin manages to hold him back. The officer pushes Myshkin, sending him flying across the room. By this time, Keller is also defending Nastasya. Keller introduces himself to the officer, saying he is standing in for "the weaker sex." However, the officer has now finally calmed down. Rogozhin emerges and grabs Nastasya; as he is leading her away he mocks the officer's bloody face. The officer politely introduces himself to Myshkin and walks away.

The speed with which this ostensibly polite scene degrades into absolute chaos and outright violence suggests that the veneer of respectability in the world of the novel is always hiding far more sinister, violent dynamics. It is significant that Nastasya's acts are seen as so abhorrent that the officer violates the strict expectation of not enacting violence on women in a public place. In a sense, Nastasya's demonic behavior perhaps stop others from seeing her as a woman at all.

PART THREE, CHAPTER THREE

Terrified, Mrs. Epanchin and her daughters practically run home from the vauxhall. The others, meanwhile, are somewhat relieved that Evgeny's connection to Nastasya is finally no longer a mystery. On the way home, the Epanchin women run into General Epanchin, who immediately asks about Evgeny. He then whispers something to Prince Shch., leaving the prince looking shocked. A little later, Aglaya comes out of the house to find Myshkin sitting on a chair on the terrace. She asks if him if he would agree to participate if someone challenged him to a duel. Myshkin replies that he would be frightened, and Aglaya accuses him of being a coward. However, Myshkin points out that cowards run away.

Aglaya's conversation with Myshkin, when combined with the previous scene, suggests that it is mistaken to believe that women naturally abhor violence while men do not. Perhaps because of the shifting social norms of the time or perhaps because they are both deeply unusual people, Aglaya and Nastasya are drawn to violence. They share a sense of reckless fearlessness, although it is unclear if Aglaya would actually be able to put this into practice or if she just likes to think of herself as brave.

Myshkin and Aglaya argue about how deadly duels actually are. Aglaya asks him if he owns any guns; when he says he doesn't, she tells him he should. She urges him to start doing shooting practice every day. Myshkin laughs, which makes Aglaya angry. General Epanchin enters and says he wants to speak to Myshkin. Aglaya hands the prince a note, then leaves. General Epanchin speaks to Myshkin, frequently mentioning his wife, but Myshkin is too distracted to comprehend what he's saying. General Epanchin says that Mrs. Epanchin is hysterical, and he can't understand why. Myshkin comments that Nastasya is crazy, but the general disagrees. He thinks that although she is "crooked," her interaction regarding Evgeny's uncle shows that there is a kind of reason behind her actions.

It is not clear which society thinks is worse: an insane woman who is completely out of control of her actions, or a calculatingly "crooked" one, as General Epanchin suggests is true of Nastasya. Often it seems like people claim Nastasya is insane to excuse her particularly wild and dangerous behavior. Yet perhaps they also do it to avoid considering the possibility that there is actually a terrifying logic behind her actions.

General Epanchin confirms that everything Nastasya said about Evgeny's uncle was correct. While Nastasya implied that Evgeny knew about his uncle's theft before the suicide, General Epanchin refuses to believe that's true. He then reveals that Evgeny proposed to Aglaya a month ago, and she rejected him. He says that Aglaya, who he calls a "cold-blooded little demon," has started claiming that Nastasya is trying to get her to marry Myshkin. Aglaya believes that this is why Nastasya is "trying to drive Evgeny Pavlych out of our house." The general and Mrs. Epanchin were bewildered by this claim. General Epanchin now bids Myshkin farewell.

At first it seems implausible that Nastasya would be trying to compel Aglaya and Myshkin to get married. After all, what purpose would she have in arranging such a match? At the same time, all the characters in the novel tend to be overinvested in each other's lives in one way or another, a pattern that suggests Nastasya may have a hidden motive for encouraging the marriage. Furthermore, Nastasya has proven herself to constantly have a complex web of schemes up her sleeve.

Now alone, Myshkin reads the note from Aglaya. In it, she asks him to meet her in the park at 7 a.m. the next morning. She wishes to discuss "an extremely important matter that concerns you directly." Myshkin folds the note, feeling nervous. Keller appears, telling the prince that he's been watching him and that he's ready to die for him. Myshkin realizes that Keller is talking about the officer challenging him to a duel, and laughs. Myshkin insists that they have nothing to fight about and says that he is happy to apologize to the officer. Then, seemingly joking, he says he's ready for a fight, and even suggests thy get drunk on champagne. Lebedev recently sold Myshkin 12 bottles of champagne at a "bargain" price.

The other characters change greatly through their interactions with Myshkin, but as this passage shows, Myshkin is also significantly changed by his interactions with the other characters. At the end of this passage, it appears he is willing to embrace a more hedonistic and shallow way of living in response to the absurdity of everything that has happened in the past few days.

Myshkin says goodbye to Keller, who is left confused by this strange behavior. Walking off, Myshkin talks to himself about the strange events of the day. He kisses Aglaya's note, feeling a mix of sadness and joy. It is now almost midnight, and there is no one left in the park. If someone had told him that he was in love, and that the note in his hand is a love note, Myshkin would not have believed them. In fact, he would find the idea that Aglaya loved him "monstrous." Myshkin walks into an alley, and before long Rogozhin approaches him. Tensely, Rogozhin tells him that Nastasya wants to see him that night.

Myshkin's abhorrence at the idea of being in love might seem strange, and confirm the idea that he is a childlike or even asexual person. Perhaps the purity of his soul means that he cannot imagine loving just one person, and must instead share his love with everyone around him. Or, on the other hand, he is perhaps so disturbed by the passionate, destructive examples of romantic love he has witnessed that it has put him off of romance entirely.

Myshkin says he'll come by tomorrow because he's going home now, and asks Rogozhin to accompany him. Rogozhin is baffled by this behavior. He mentions a letter Myshkin wrote in which he forgave Rogozhin for trying to attack him with the knife, and mocks Myshkin for presuming that Rogozhin regrets his actions and wants forgiveness. Now angry, Myshkin shouts at Rogozhin, telling him he's jealous and paranoid because he believes that Nastasya loves him. He continues that in reality, Nastasya loves Rogozhin even though they will destroy each other. Rogozhin grins and says that Nastasya has told him that Myshkin is in love with Aglaya; having seen the two of them together today, Rogozhin is now certain it's true.

This is one of the only times in the novel in which we see Myshkin get truly angry. Intriguingly, this anger does not take the form of an attack on Rogozhin, although he does (accurately) accuse Rogozhin of jealousy. It is also notable that what provokes Myshkin's anger is Rogozhin's indication that he does not want Myshkin's forgiveness. This links this scene to the moment in Rogozhin's house when Myshkin is horrified to hear that Rogozhin is an atheist.

Rogozhin says Nastasya hopes Myshkin will marry Aglaya and wants to see him happy. Myshkin is horrified by this. Rogozhin says that Nastasya has promised that they will be married within three weeks. Still flustered, Myshkin suddenly remembers that it is his birthday the next day. He invites Rogozhin to drink wine with him the next day and announces, "My new life has begun!" Rogozhin observes that Myshkin is acting quite unlike himself.

Again, the reader witnesses the profound impact that the events of the novel have had on Myshkin. It is almost as if he is experimenting with becoming like the people around him, rather than sticking to his own innocent and staunchly moral way of being. The result, as Rogozhin's reaction shows, is quite alarming.

PART THREE, CHAPTER FOUR

Myshkin and Rogozhin approach Lebedev's dacha and see a lively crowd gathered on the terrace, drinking champagne. Myshkin is confused why they are all there. When he enters the crowd, everyone lines up to wish him happy birthday. A very drunk Lebedev explains that a number of different people had, by chance, been waiting for Myshkin on the terrace when Keller showed up and said the next day was the prince's birthday. Kolya then insisted that there should be a party with champagne. Lebedev emphasizes that it is his own champagne being served, not the bottles the prince bought. Even Ferdyshchenko is there, as is Evgeny, who tells Myshkin that he's managed to dissuade the officer from challenging him to a duel.

Myshkin's haphazard, spontaneous surprise birthday party illustrates how popular he has become within the social world of the novel. People were queuing up to see him on the terrace of Lebedev's dacha without even realizing that it was his birthday. Of course, this lack of awareness also points to the way in which many of the characters use Myshkin to their own ends, seeking his advice, alliance, or support rather than having a proper reciprocal friendship with him.

Evgeny says that he's going to St. Petersburg the next day to sort out his uncle's business. He says he wants to be Myshkin's friend, and that he also wants to have a private conversation with him, but this isn't the right place for it. Myshkin then speaks to Ippolit, who says that he's glad that today is Myshkin's birthday. Seeing Ippolit's liveliness, Myshkin suggests that he should rest, but Ippolit dismisses him, calling Myshkin his "nanny." At some point, the group have decided to have a debate, with General Ivolgin acting as "chairman"—a role he enthusiastically embraces. Keller comments that he likes the way members of parliament in England speak, addressing each other as "the noble earl" and "my noble opponent."

It is significant that the most common party activity among the characters in the novel is having debates, usually over political or philosophical issues. This reflects the central role that contemporary issues and ideologies play in the lives of the characters. It is also a way for Dostoevsky to constantly explore philosophical matters and experiment with presenting different viewpoints through the framework of the novel's plot.

The group debate philosophical matters, although the conversation at times veers into nonsense. Among the questions debated is whether industrialization is ruining the spiritual aspect of human existence. They then move onto a discussion of cannibalism instigated by Lebedev, who claims that in the twelfth century, famines forced poor people to eat "sixty monks and several lay babies." The others dismiss this as ridiculous, but at this point Myshkin speaks for the first time, suggesting that Lebedev might be right. He talks about the steep taxes that people have to pay to the clergy, and asks how poor people are supposed to be able to feed themselves. Ganya suggests that the starving masses chose to eat monks because in the 12th century, monks were the only people who were fat.

This passage shows how a silly and comic turn in conversation can also contain very serious, important consideration of the novel's themes. While the cannibalistic consumption of monks might seem amusingly outlandish, in reality the disproportionate wealth of the church and its role in keeping peasants in a state of poverty had been a major issue in Russia for many centuries. Indeed, it is only in the era in which The Idiot *is set that substantial actions are finally being taken to curb the greed of the clergy.*

Lebedev agrees, saying that at this time the clergy were 60 times fatter than everyone else. He continues as if he was in court defending a client who ate several babies. He talks about the present, describing it as "the age of crime and railways" instead of "the age of steam and railways" and blaming it on his drunken state. He considers the question of progress, and argues that although there is more wealth in the contemporary moment than there was in the past, there is also "less force," less of an idea holding everything together. He claims: "We're all, all, all overstewed!"

Lebedev's slip between "the age of steam and railways" and "the age of crime and railways" is very revealing. It indicates that, contrary to the idea that modernization brings greater peace and prosperity, it in fact might cause an increase in corruption, chaos, and crime.

Everyone laughs, but Keller remains serious and accuses Lebedev of "attack[ing] enlightenment" in favor of medieval backwardness. Toward the end of this conversation, Ganya suddenly seems troubled by something, and gets up to sit by Rogozhin. Myshkin, meanwhile, is in a jolly mood. Evgeny expresses annoyance about Ippolit's presence.

Lebedev's speech could be interpreted as implying that it would be better to go back to the preindustrial age. As a young nihilist who is very much the product of his modern era, Keller is appalled by this idea.

PART THREE, CHAPTER FIVE

During Lebedev's speech, Ippolit fell asleep on the sofa, but he now suddenly wakes up and looks alarmed. He asks if he's missed the whole thing, but Evgeny tells him he's only been asleep for a few minutes. Ippolit announces to the whole crowd that Myshkin is in love. He then speaks to Myshkin directly, asking if it's true that he is a Christian. He requests more champagne from Keller, but Myshkin takes his glass away. Ippolit then announces that "the hour has come," and takes a sealed envelope out of his pocket. Myshkin asks if it might be better for them to wait until tomorrow, but Ippolit insists that "tomorrow there will be no time." However, he insists it will only take him an hour to read the article he is holding.

Ippolit's ruthless, rather bratty behavior makes him instantly unlikeable. His decision to do things like publicly embarrass Myshkin by declaring that he is in love seem to come from nowhere other than a nasty, vindictive spirit. However, it is also important to remember that Ippolit is dying at an extremely young ag, and is thus experiencing a profound and harrowing loss of control. In all likelihood, this is the reason why he acts up, as a desperate attempt to assert his own agency.

Ippolit rather dramatically asks if he should read the article, and everyone tells him not to. He asks if they're frightened by the article, and then asks someone to flip a coin. It comes up heads, and Ippolit announces that he will now read. At this point the crowd have become furious, and some are indeed afraid. Ippolit announces that the article he is going to read is called "A Necessary Statement." It begins with the epigram: "*Après moi le deluge*" (which means "After me the flood" in French). Rogozhin comments that Ippolit should hurry up. At this point, Ippolit suddenly accuses Rogozhin of sitting in his room for an hour at 1 a.m. last week. He claims it was to "torment" him.

Ippolit's dramatic reading is comic before it even begins, due to the disconnect between how he evidently wants his audience to feel about it and what they actually feel in reality. While Ippolit attempts to bathe in the drama of his reading and fantasies that the audience are frightened of what he will say, in reality they are just bored and uninspired by Ippolit's melodramatic antics.

Ippolit begins reading his article, which is included in full in the novel. It begins with a description of a visit that took place yesterday between Ippolit and Myshkin. Ippolit says he hated Myshkin for five months, but this hatred has become to subside now. He wrote the entirety of the "explanation" in one day. He says he used to feel sad about his coming death, but now that it is just about to happen he feels nothing at all. He wonders aloud if it's true that he only has two weeks left to live. He notes that tuberculosis can kill someone unexpectedly, in an instant.

Here Ippolit provides a very simple and explicit description of how his imminent death has shaped his nihilistic outlook on the world. Having experienced the trauma and devastation of learning that he was going to die, he now feels a sense of apathy—which some might argue is even worse.

Ippolit says he was surprised that Myshkin guessed that he has nightmares, and that coming to Pavlovsk would help ease them. He observes that Myshkin is "either a doctor or indeed of an extraordinary intelligence," yet adds that he is also definitely an idiot. Just before Myshkin came to visit, Ippolit had a dream in which he was lying in a room in the presence of a scorpion-like monster. Mrs. Terentyev and "an acquaintance of hers" entered the room, along with the family dog, Norma, who in reality died five years ago. At first Norma seemed afraid of the monster, but then she opened her mouth and ate it. Norma immediately started squealing, as the monster had stung her and was still alive in her mouth.

Ippolit seems to want to believe that the dream he had is filled with dramatic symbolic meaning. In reality, whatever meaning it has is not necessarily obvious or interesting to anyone present. The only intriguing thing about it is the mention of the "acquaintance" of Mrs. Terentyev. Although there is no way of knowing this, the acquaintance may be General Ivolgin, because in addition to borrowing money from Mrs. Terentyev it is hinted Ivolgin is having an affair with her.

At this point, Ippolit woke up and Myshkin came in. The people gathered begin to object that Ippolit is talking too much about himself. Ippolit says if anyone doesn't want to listen they can leave, and Rogozhin points out that this isn't even Ippolit's house. Ippolit looks momentarily embarrassed, but soon embarks again on his reading. He explains that as soon as he learned he was dying of consumption, he became desperate to keep living. He would gladly accept being a homeless beggar, as long as he could be "healthy." He self-consciously admits that those present might think he is like a second-rate student. He admits that he might not be able to convey all the thoughts that he wants to, but continues anyway.

Significantly, Ippolit's statement that he would choose to be a homeless beggar if it meant he could keep on living reflects something Myshkin said at the beginning of the novel during his conversation with the Epanchin women. Myshkin noted that while in Switzerland, he came to believe that anyone could have a meaningful life, even someone in prison, and connects this realization to having witnessed an execution. There is thus a surprising point of convergence between Ippolit and Myshkin's outlooks on life.

PART THREE, CHAPTER SIX

When Ippolit became very ill about eight months ago, he cut himself off from his friends, and was also isolated within the context of his family. He is disappointed to see that Kolya, who has always been a loyal friend, has taken on Myshkin's "Christian humility," which Ippolit finds "ridiculous." In March, Ippolit began to feel a little better. While he was walking outside, a man in front of him dropped his wallet, which Ippolit picked up. He ran after the man, which caused him to lose his breath. He managed to follow the man into a house, and found him lying, drunk, in bed. Ippolit could see from the state of the house and the man's family are terribly impoverished.

Ippolit's disdain for Myshkin's "Christian humility" is arguably a case of youthful arrogance. Yet it also might indicate that the kindness and innocence of Myshkin's way of being in the world might be too much for someone in as much pain and despair as Ippolit. Facing the cruel absurdity of life and the certainty of death, nihilism is the only ideology that makes sense to him.

At first, the drunk man was angry that Ippolit came into his house, but when Ippolit showed him the wallet and explained that he dropped it, the man was stunned. He said that all of his documents were in there, and that he would have been destroyed if the wallet was lost. Seeing Ippolit coughing, the man came to sit next to him and told him he was a "medical man." (Ippolit notes that he specifically did not say "doctor.") The man went on to explain that he had been a provincial doctor but had lost his job. He'd come to St. Petersburg to try and get reinstated, and in the meantime his family sank into a state of extreme poverty.

Ippolit's act of kindness seems like a strange anecdote to include in a speech about nihilism. Indeed, this is the kind of anecdote one would expect to find in Christian writing. This is particularly true because of how it demonstrates that vulnerable people, despite their own misfortune, are capable of helping each other. This provides a redemptive aspect to suffering.

Ippolit told the man that he knew the nephew of the state councilor who would be able to reinstate him. This nephew, named Bakhmutov, was an old schoolmate of Ippolit's. Back at school, Bakhmutov was very popular; Ippolit was the only one who didn't like him. Where Bakhmutov was been friendly to Ippolit, Ippolit was rude in response. Now, when Ippolit went to see Bakhmutov and told him the story about the doctor, Bakhmutov promised to talk to his uncle immediately. Within six weeks, the doctor was granted a new post, and Bakhmutov even threw him a farewell party. After the party, when the two of them were walking alone, Bakhmutov thanked Ippolit for making it possible for him to do this good deed.

Clearly, Ippolit and Bakhmutov are opposites. Unlike Ippolit, Bakhmutov is a kind, happy person who doesn't hold grudges and relishes the opportunity to do a good deed. Another key piece of information provided in this passage is that Ippolit's grouchy, misanthropic character actually preceded his affliction with tuberculosis. Even as a healthy schoolboy, he was rude to Bakhmutov for no reason.

In response, Ippolit told Bakhmutov about an old state councilor in Moscow who always went to visit prisoners about to be sent to Siberia and called them "dear hearts," giving them money and gifts. Ippolit reflects that in doing good for others, one ends up transforming the world more than it is possible to know. Bakhmutov exclaimed how tragic it was that Ippolit was soon going to die. Around this time, Ippolit developed a sense of his "ultimate conviction," although he doesn't yet reveal what this is. About 10 days ago he went to see Rogozhin, whom he had never met before. Ippolit was intrigued by Rogozhin, who he believes is a "man of intelligence."

Again, this anecdote does not appear to be heading in the direction that one would expect for a speech about nihilism. On the other hand, it is important to remember that the form of nihilism under the discussion in the novel did not reject social goods altogether. In fact, it advocated for radical change to Russian society in order to make it more egalitarian.

Ippolit was also struck by Rogozhin's gloomy house. After the visit, he felt very unwell, and was delirious. He suddenly remembers a painting he saw in Rogozhin's house, the copy of Holbein's "The Dead Christ." Ippolit notes that, unlike other paintings of Jesus's dead body, this depiction does not show Christ as "beautiful," but rather a totally devastated, lifeless, and even disgusting corpse. He reflects that if this is truly what Jesus's body looked like after the crucifixion, he cannot imagine how any of his disciples truly believed in the resurrection. The painting thus depicts Christ as having been destroyed by the cruel and ultimately senseless and absurd forces of nature.

By "nature," Ippolit does not necessarily mean the natural world of trees, plants, and animals. Rather, he means a physical world without God or religion. He argues that Holbein's painting shows Christ to be only a man in the sense that he was not able to overcome or transcend the physical reality of what was done to him. He seems to suggest that once someone has seen the visual reality of this possibility (in the painting), they will not be able to maintain Christian belief.

Ippolit says these thoughts came to him in pieces, and asks: "Can something that has no image come as an image?" After the visit to Rogozhin's house, Ippolit lay in bed, and at 1 a.m. Rogozhin came in. He sat silently and stared at Ippolit. Feeling infuriated, Ippolit then wondered if Rogozhin is really there, or if he is just hallucinating. He had never hallucinated before, not even in the midst of his illness. Whereas earlier at his house Rogozhin was wearing slippers, now, sitting in Ippolit's room, he was dressed in white tie. He is not sure how long Rogozhin stayed, and only knows that eventually, he left as silently as he first came in. After, Ippolit realized the door was locked from the inside the whole time.

Ippolit's possibly hallucinatory encounter with Rogozhin echoes exactly what happened to Myshkin when he felt Rogozhin's eyes on him. Both characters wonder if their illness is to blame, but—at least in Myshkin's case—it turned out that Rogozhin was really there (and was trying to kill him). The spectral, monstrous presence of Rogozhin in both these scenes emphasizes the idea that he is straightforwardly evil, an ongoing foil to the way that Myshkin is straightforwardly good.

PART THREE, CHAPTER SEVEN

Ippolit now describes a small pistol he has owned since he was a child, and first became fascinated by highway robberies and duels. He notes that it is a "trashy pistol [that] doesn't shoot straight," but will work if he points it at himself. He announces that he has decided to die in Pavlovsk at sunrise. His "Necessary Explanation" will explain everything to police, psychologists, and anyone else who cares to read it. He has given one copy to Myshkin and the other to Aglaya, and arranged for his skeleton to be donated to the Medical Academy.

On one hand, considering that Ippolit is suffering from a terminal illness anyway, his decision to kill himself might be interpreted as perfectly reasonable. Yet at the same time, his highly dramatic speech, mention of his fascination with highway robberies and duels, and the fact that he plans to die at sunrise suggest this is more of a theatrical than rational act.

Recently, Ippolit realized that if he committed a terrible crime (such as murdering several people), he would frustrate anyone trying to punish him considering he is going to die within weeks anyway. He wonders why others in his position don't commit crimes. As it stands, he doesn't seek anyone's forgiveness before his death. He finds it ridiculous that people think he should care about the beauty of Pavlovsk when he is about to die. He doesn't see why he should have to have humility in the face of the cruelty of the world. He reflects that if it had been up to him, he probably would not have chosen to be born.

Ippolit's reflection on why more terminally ill people choose not to commit crimes could, from a different perspective, actually be taken as evidence of fundamental human goodness. Indeed, it is precisely this kind of fact that Christians often point to in support of the idea that every person is fundamentally good, even if people often end up committing immoral acts during their lives.

Ippolit says he wants to make clear that he is not committing suicide because his final few weeks will be too painful to endure, he is doing so because it is the last act of free will he can exercise. This concludes the "Necessary Explanation" article. The audience, feeling tired, irritated, and rather drunk, get up from their chairs. Suddenly, Ippolit shouts that the sun has risen. Again, this fails to elicit any kind of response in everyone else. When Ganya comments that it will likely be another hot day and asks Ptitsyn if they are leaving, Ippolit accuses him of deliberately pretending to be unbothered in order to "insult" him.

The tragedy of Ippolit's dramatic speech is that it does not give him the one thing he seeks, the one thing that can give him satisfaction in his terminally ill state: recognition. His decision to kill himself because it is his last chance to exercise his own free will is actually a rather fascinating and moving proposition, but at this point everyone is so bored by his self-centered rambling that they simply don't care.

Vera is the only person worried that Ippolit seems to be about to commit suicide, and rushes to him. Several others grumble, "He won't shoot himself." Kolya joins Vera in holding Ippolit, as do Keller and Burdovsky, though Burdovsky asserts that Ippolit has the right to kill himself. Ivolgin repeats that Ippolit won't shoot himself, adding: "It's a boyish prank." There is an argument about whether those present might actually want to see Ippolit shoot himself, which Ippolit insists is the case. Lebedev says that if Ippolit hands over his gun, he can stay the night in his dacha. If he does not, Lebedev will report him to the police. Another argument ensues.

The way Ippolit acts here does not help convince others that he really means to kill himself. Unlike someone who has actually had a profound philosophical revelation, he remains obsessed with what other people think and clings to the deluded idea that people have strong feelings about his imminent suicide, when really they don't care one way or another because they don't believe it's actually going to happen.

Ippolit speaks briefly to Myshkin, who tries to comfort him and urges him to drink a glass of water. Ippolit grabs a class from the table and tears himself away, going straight out to the terrace. He raises the gun to his head and pulls the trigger, just as Keller leaps over and seizes the gun from his hands. After the brief climax of commotion dies down, everyone sees that Ippolit is completely fine. Clearing up the confusion, Keller explains that there is no cap in the gun. Everyone immediately bursts into laughter. Humiliated, Ippolit rushes around trying to get a cap for the gun until he faints. He is carried into Myshkin's study, and Lebedev calls for a doctor.

Ippolit's ridiculous attempt at ending his life with drama and dignity backfires in a profound way, and he is left humiliated. Of course, it is also worth noting that the attendees of Myshkin's party show remarkably little sympathy to Ippolit considering that he is a very young man on the edge of death. Even though he has bored everyone with his theatrics, the moral thing to do would be to show sympathy and kindness with him anyway.

Keller, meanwhile, threatens anyone who dares to imply that Ippolit left the cap out on purpose. Evgeny and Myshkin discuss whether Ippolit is capable of killing himself or others, as he discussed in the "Necessary Explanation." After everyone leaves, Myshkin takes a walk in the park alone, feeling agitated. Suddenly, he remembers an incident from his time in Switzerland, during his first year of treatment. He went walking by himself and, beholding a beautiful natural landscape, started to cry. He felt disconnected and alienated from the natural world that he loved so much.

Unsurprisingly, Myshkin feels isolated in Pavlovsk. The constant drama, scheming, and scandals clash so dramatically with his personality that he is shrouded in loneliness. At the same time, his recollection of his time in Switzerland indicates that he also experienced loneliness and alienation there—not from other people, from the world itself.

Back in Pavlovsk, Myshkin falls asleep on a bench. In a dream, a woman he knows very well, but who somehow has a different face, comes to him crying. She seemingly wanting to show him something, and he gets up to follow her. However, at this point is woken up by the laughter of Aglaya, who is standing over him.

Aglaya's constant laughter at Myshkin is certainly cruel, but it is also clear by now that this is her only way of expressing her feelings about him. Strongly attached to him, she laughs as a way of managing the intensity of emotion he provokes in her.

PART THREE, CHAPTER EIGHT

Bewildered, Myshkin says he thought there was another woman there, which shocks Aglaya. He then realizes that it was just a dream. He tells her about Ippolit's failed suicide attempt, along with all the other events of the night. Aglaya then says they have to hurry because she must be home by 8 a.m. Myshkin suggests that perhaps Ippolit was hoping his speech would make everyone express their love for him and beg him to stay alive. Aglaya remembers that she had similar thoughts at age 13, when she would dream of poisoning herself so that her parents would feel sorry for how they treated her.

Aglaya's words highlight a similarity between her and Ippolit, and indeed between all young people who dream of asserting dominance by acts of self-harm. In this sense, it would be wrong to condemn Ippolit too harshly for his antics. Like every other young person, he just needs a chance to mature—yet, tragically, he will not get one.

Aglaya announces that the reason why she brought Myshkin here is to "propose that you be my friend." She blushes, and Myshkin says he never imagined there would be any need for such a proposal. She asks if he, like her family, thinks she is a "fool," and he replies that he thinks she is very intelligent. Aglaya is thrilled. She says that she wants to be taken seriously, that she's decided to run away from home, and that she wants Myshkin to help her. She says she wants to talk to Myshkin about everything. She also says that her family is convinced that she is in love with him and is "waiting" for him.

Both Aglaya and Myshkin suffer from being mistaken for fools. In both cases, this is partly due to their unusual, often illegible behavior. People do not understand them, so they dismiss them as foolish. In Aglaya's case, it is made worse by the fact that she is a young, unmarried woman. Coming from this social position, it is almost impossible to get people to take her seriously.

Aglaya tells Myshkin that she hates the elite social world in which she has been brought up, and dreams of achieving greater things than getting married. When Myshkin tells her that what she's said is "absurd," she threatens to marry Ganya if he doesn't help her. Still horrified, Myshkin asks if Aglaya has ever lived anywhere other than her parents' house, such as at boarding school. Aglaya replies that she's been "bottled up" her whole life, and will "get married right out of the bottle." She accuses him of expecting her to confess that she is in love with him, and Myshkin replies he was actually afraid that might happen. Aglaya is furious and claims to be in love with Ganya. Myshkin says he knows that's not true.

It is surprising that Myshkin's reaction to Aglaya's frustrations is to call them "absurd," particularly because he is usually so sympathetic with people—even when they express beliefs that are truly *absurd. Myshkin's rejection of Aglaya's frustrations shows how deeply-ingrained traditional ideas about gender are in the world of the novel. Myshkin might be a radical "democrat," but he still cannot fathom why Aglaya would be dissatisfied with her highly restrictive life.*

Aglaya says that Ganya burned his hand in front of her to demonstrate his love. After Myshkin refuses to believe this, Aglaya admits she was lying. Myshkin chastises her for being cruel to him and to Nastasya, and Aglaya angrily replies that she knows Myshkin proposed to Nastasya and that she rejected him. Myshkin explains that he doesn't love Nastasya, but rather just feels deeply empathetic for her, because he sees the staggering intensity of her suffering. Aglaya finally admits that Nastasya writes her letters every day, claiming that she is in love with her and at the same time urging her to marry Myshkin. Nastasya also writes that she knows Myshkin loves Aglaya and wants him to be happy.

In a way, Aglaya seems to want to live in a more dramatic world than her reality. This emerges in her lie about Ganya burning his hand out of love for her. At the same time, when people around her act in a truly *strange, dramatic, and impassioned way—namely, when Nastasya sends her the letters—Aglaya balks. She wants the fantasy of a passionate life, but perhaps not the reality.*

Myshkin repeats that Nastasya is "insane." However, when Aglaya asks him what to do so she stops receiving the letters, Myshkin begs her to "let her be" and promises to deal with hit himself. Aglaya becomes angry and tells Myshkin to throw the letters at Nastasya. She threatens that if she receives even one more, she will ensure that Nastasya is locked up in an asylum. Mrs. Epanchin suddenly begins walking over to see what all the commotion is about. Aglaya embraces her mother and says that she is going to marry Ganya.

Although there are parallels in the oppressive ways in which Nastasya and Aglaya are treated, and in the frustrations they develop as a result, Aglaya cannot bring herself to feel an iota of sympathy for Nastasya. She calls Nastasya insane, not realizing that other characters, such as the members of her family, level the exact same accusation at her.

PART THREE, CHAPTER NINE

When she and Myshkin reenter the house, Mrs. Epanchin is in a state of shock. Slowly recovering, she asks Myshkin what they were doing in the park, and Myshkin explains that they met to talk for an hour or so. Satisfied with this answer, Mrs. Epanchin bids the prince farewell. After he leaves, Adelaida comments that Myshkin has become more graceful lately. Meanwhile, Myshkin arrives home to his dacha and tells Vera that he needs to sleep. She begs him to allow Ippolit to stay, and Myshkin agrees. Just as Myshkin tries to sleep, Kolya arrives. He praises Ippolit's "confession," and says that he can't stand it that people believe that Ippolit left the cap off the gun on purpose.

Kolya is young and impressionable, and it is perhaps for this reason that he is impressed by Ippolit's decidedly lackluster speech because he is young and impressionable. Yet his sympathy for Ippolit lies in his own kind, compassionate nature, which is highly reminiscent of Myshkin. In a sense, Kolya is Myshkin's protégé.

Lebedev enters and addresses Myshkin in an unusually formal, polite manner. He says that 400 roubles went missing from his wallet yesterday. Myshkin briefly interrupts to ask if Lebedev put an advert in the newspaper for gold and silver pawning, and Lebedev admits he did, but without listing his name and address. Lebedev continues to say that he noticed the money was missing at 7:30 a.m. that morning. Someone at the party must have taken it from his wallet, or picked it up if he dropped it on the floor. Lebedev is sure it wasn't his maid or his children, which means one of the guests must have done it.

As if Myshkin's party weren't dramatic enough, another scandal weaves its way into the scene. Considering most people at the party a) are rich and b) consider themselves too respectable to do something like steal, the obvious candidates are the young nihilists, who enjoy committing social violations for fun, and General Ivolgin, who has problems with debt.

Lebedev narrows down the suspects based on their movements during the party to General Ivolgin, Keller, and Ferdyshchenko. When he discovered the money was missing he was convinced that Keller must have taken it, and he and General Ivolgin searched him while he was sleeping. Having found nothing, they woke him up and interrogated him, at which point they determined that he had not stolen the money. Meanwhile, there is evidence to suggest that Ferdyshchenko is the thief, such as the fact that he left the party early to go and see another friend—someone named Vilkin. Furthermore, when Lebedev went to Vilkin's house, his maid said Ferdyshchenko wasn't there.

Because Lebedev is such a comic character, the sudden arrival of this detective-like subplot has a humorous edge to it, even though it is a fairly dark subject matter. This subplot provides an interesting exploration of the question of whether those who come to mind as obvious villains (e.g. Ferdyshchenko) are the ones that actually tend to commit crimes.

General Ivolgin, meanwhile, comically demanded that Lebedev search him in order to prove that he didn't steal the money. However, Lebedev noticed that the general had turned white and was shaking. Lebedev says he will be loyal to Ivolgin no matter what, but that he knows he's in a dire state, with no money at all. He asks Myshkin if Ivolgin has tried to borrow money from him, and Myshkin says he hasn't. Ivolgin wants to accompany Lebedev when he goes to hunt down Ferdyshchenko in St. Petersburg. Lebedev plans to let Ivolgin go off on his own and then catch him in the act with Mrs. Terentyev, with whom he's been having an affair.

There appears to be a lot of obvious evidence that General Ivolgin is the culprit, but Lebedev chooses to dismiss this out of loyalty to his friend. At the same time, he knows that Ivolgin is guilty of something: having an affair. His decision to catch him in the act could be framed as an act of kindness, however, because it might encourage Ivolgin to stop the affair before anyone else finds out (including his wife).

Myshkin says he wants to support Lebedev, but begs him not to involve Nina or Kolya. He also wants to be sure that Lebedev is absolutely confident that Ferdyshchenko is the culprit. Myshkin falteringly attempts to explain that he's heard that one most not say anything "superfluous" in Ferdyshchenko's presence, and that he is actually far more intelligent and competent than Ivolgin. Lebedev admits that Ivolgin is a pathological liar, but also says that Ivolgin said the same thing about Ferdyshchenko as Myshkin just did. He believes that this further proves Ferdyshchenko is guilty. Myshkin agrees to help Lebedev but begs him to keep the whole thing quiet.

Myshkin has come to learn that corrupt behavior in itself is viewed as nothing compared to the disgrace of public scandal. He therefore doesn't mind involving himself in the dirty business of catching the thief and setting up General Ivolgin, but will only do so on the conditions that it all be kept quiet. In this sense, we once again see the effect that being friends with people like Mrs. Epanchin has had on Myshkin.

PART THREE, CHAPTER TEN

Myshkin finally goes to sleep and dreams about Nastasya again. He wakes up feeling anguished and reads the letters from Nastasya that Aglaya gave him. Reading the letters are like a "strange and unnatural" dream. The narrator reflects on the nature of dreams, and how, upon waking up from a dream, one usually feels that there is something they have failed to understand that is now lost forever. He is horrified by the fact that Nastasya wrote to Aglaya in the first place, and even more disturbed by what she actually said—so much so that he won't even voice it himself. He characterizes the whole situation as "a dream, a nightmare, and an insanity."

Myshkin's comparison of Nastasya's letter writing to a bad dream illuminates the fact that the whole situation terrifies him because he can't understand it. He does not know why Nastasya is writing to Aglaya or what her end goal is. This produces a terrible feeling of loss of control, which in turn terrifies him in the same way that one is terrified by being trapped in a nightmare.

In one of the letters, Nastasya calls Aglaya "perfection" and confesses her love for her. She says she would kiss the ground on which Aglaya stands. In another letter, she talks about her hope that Aglaya marries Myshkin, adding: "You and he are one for me." In another, she writes that if she were to paint a picture of Christ she would depict him alone apart from a small child, who would be peacefully listening to him. She then tells Aglaya that she is innocent, and therefore perfect. Nastasya predicts that she will die soon, and in her final letter she urges Aglaya not to think that she is humiliating herself by writing these letters.

The surreal content of Nastasya's letters manages to collapse herself, Myshkin, and Aglaya into each other in different ways. In saying that Aglaya and Myshkin are "one" for her, Nastasya seems to be implying that she sees them as interchangeable somehow, which would mean that, if she loves Aglaya, she loves Myshkin also. Meanwhile, she then repeats the words that Myshkin said to her (about being perfect and innocent) as a confession of love to Aglaya.

In this last letter, Nastasya admits that she has "renounced the world," and predicts that Rogozhin will kill her because his love for her is so passionate that it resembles hatred. Myshkin, who has been aimlessly wandering around the park, finally walks to the Epanchins' dacha. Although no one greets him at the door he walks in anyway and meets Alexandra, who informs him that it is half-past midnight. Aglaya and Mrs. Epanchin are both not feeling well and are already in bed. Myshkin leaves her, still feeling as if he is in a dream. Back in the park, he sees Nastasya and at first thinks he's hallucinating, but then realizes she's really there.

At this point both Nastasya and Myshkin have predicted that Nastasya and Rogozhin's romance will end in him killing her. This lends a sense of inevitability to Nastasya's fate, further emphasizing the loss of control that undergirds this whole part of the narrative. Indeed, Myshkin feels so out of control of his life that he moves around as if he is in a dream, hardly aware of his own actions, and doing strange things like showing up at the Epanchins' at 12:30 a.m.

Nastasya gets on her knees and begs Myshkin to tell her if he's happy. She promises that this is the last time he will ever see her. Myshkin suddenly sees Rogozhin standing behind her. Rogozhin leads Nastasya away, promising to return quickly. When he does, he tells Myshkin that Nastasya has been waiting to see him all day, and that she is leaving tomorrow. Rogozhin says he's read the letters, but when Myshkin declares that Nastasya is "insane," Rogozhin suggests that perhaps she isn't. Finally, he also asks Myshkin if he is happy, and when Myshkin miserably replies he isn't, Rogozhin laughs.

There no explicit answer is given as to why Nastasya and Rogozhin are both so desperate to know if Myshkin is unhappy. The most likely explanation would seem to be that, as corrupt individuals who have surrendered themselves to their own immorality, they remain curious about whether innocence actually brings happiness.

PART FOUR, CHAPTER ONE

A week after Myshkin and Nastasya's meeting in the park, Varya returns home from a visit with friends, feeling thoughtful and troubled. The narrator then embarks on a long reflection on the "ordinary" people who constitute most of the human population, yet who are underrepresented in works of literature. The narrator asks how ordinary people *should* be depicted in literature, and suggests that it is the task of the novelist to find and represent the quirks that exist even in the most normal individuals. The characters in *The Idiot* who are ordinary include Varya, Ptitsyn, and Ganya.

This strange, metaliterary reflection on ordinary people betrays Dostoevsky's preoccupation with representing the truth of human nature. The Idiot *is not just meant to be an entertaining story, but a reflection on the actual qualities of humankind. Yet, as the narrator points out here, accurately reflecting normal people can be difficult for novelists, and is a rare feat.*

The narrator goes on to argue that some people deludedly believe they are special, whereas others are "much cleverer." The less intelligent people are naïve, but happier than the latter category. One of the best representations of this kind of person is Lieutenant Pirogov, a character in Nikolai Gogol's story "Nevsky Prospekt." Ganya is in the "much cleverer" category, but desperately wants to be special. Sometimes, people who know they aren't special but want to be end up doing extreme things in order to be more original. Ganya has got close to doing such a thing many times, but in each case he has backed down at the last minute. He is horrified by his family's fallen fortunes. Sometimes he resolves to be cruel, but it never lasts.

The peculiar tragedy of Ganya lies in the fact that he seems to know what it would take to be the kind of man he wants to be, but can't bring himself to do it. Put simply, he is a coward: each time he resolves to do something bold, he stops himself. In a sense, the narrator implies that knowing you are ordinary but wanting to be special is the worst possible position to be in, because it affords neither the bliss of ignorance nor the satisfaction of embracing an unexceptional life.

Ganya is financially supported by Ptitsyn and lives in his house. Ganya despises Ptitsyn and this arrangement. He resentfully calls Ptitsyn a Jew because of his success in finance. Varya, meanwhile, is a sensible, ordinary person, and doesn't mind not being special. Her decision to marry Ptitsyn was pragmatic and wise. Sometimes Ptitsyn gently suggests to Ganya that he should get a job, while Varya ingratiates herself to the Epanchins in order to help her brother.

Here the narrator indicates that accepting one's status as ordinary makes for an easier life, however they don't indicate that there is anything particularly noble about it. Indeed, Varya's life is defined neither by the absolute selflessness of Myshkin nor absolute selfishness of Rogozhin or Ippolit, but instead by pragmatic decisions and small sacrifices.

That morning in Pavlovsk, Varya comes home from the visit with her friends and hears Ganya shouting inside their house. Coming in, she asks him if he's angry for the same reason as usual. Ganya curses their parents and promises that he will throw "him" (Ippolit) out of the house. When he begins to calm down, Varya tells him that it's official: Myshkin and Aglaya are engaged, and Adelaida's wedding has once again been pushed back, so that the two weddings can happen together. That night, the Epanchins will host "old Belokonsky" and publicly announce the engagement. Ganya asks if General and Mrs. Epanchin are happy; Varya says that the general is, but Mrs. Epanchin is worried.

Aglaya and Myshkin's engagement both is and isn't an unexpected plot twist. It is obvious that the two had feelings for each other and had developed a special relationship, not to mention the close connection Myshkin has to Aglaya's family. At the same time, though, the possibility of Myshkin successfully marrying someone still seems slim. Although he is extremely loving, he is an unusually non-romantic person, and it is difficult to imagine him placing Aglaya above all others as marriage demands.

Varya says that Aglaya laughs at Myshkin all day in order to conceal her true feelings. She then lets slip that the day before, General Ivolgin drunkenly went to the Epanchins' dacha and, when he learned General Epanchin wasn't there, spoke to Mrs. Epanchin. He asked her for a job and complained about Varya, Ganya, and Ptitsyn. Varya is not sure if the Epanchin daughters know about this incident. She suggests that if Ganya had been able to endure his misfortunes with a bit more courage, he may have been able to win Aglaya's heart after all. She then says that she's worried about the impact of General Ivolgin's actions yesterday on their mother, and goes to see her.

All of Varya's work trying to get the Epanchins to like her in order to reopen the possibility of Ganya marrying Aglaya has instantly been undone by Ivolgin's behavior. In this sense, this passage highlights the impossibly difficult nature of being an "ordinary" person trying to keep everything together in a world overrun by scandal and bad behavior.

Before Varya leaves the room, Ganya suggests it was Ippolit who told Nina about General Ivolgin's visit to the Epanchins'. Ganya believes Ippolit considers him his "personal enemy." He goes on to suggest that Ippolit may in fact be conducting a whole scheme to bring down their family while living in their house. He again declares that he is going to throw Ippolit out, though Varya tells him not to. At that moment, General Ivolgin enters, looking "purple" and "shaken" with anger, alongside Nina, Kolya, and Ippolit.

Perhaps Ippolit is indeed choosing to bring down the Ivolgins as the final sinful act he mentioned during his "Necessary Explanation." On the other hand, Ganya may be inflating the extent to which Ippolit hates him and consider him his "personal enemy." Ippolit seems to hate everyone, and it is arguably Ganya's self-centeredness that makes him believe he is singled out.

PART FOUR, CHAPTER TWO

Ippolit has been living at the Ptitsyns' house for five days. Rogozhin had started visiting him before he moved. Now, General Ivolgin, Nina, and Kolya all look very distressed. Ivolgin hasn't drunk any alcohol in three days. Kolya is so worried by this that he has bought a bottle of vodka for his father and begs Nina to let him drink it. Screaming at Ptitsyn, Ivolgin says: "it's either him or me," and then threatens to leave the house. Ippolit protests that he hasn't done anything, but Ivolgin shouts in reply that Ippolit has been forcing his atheist beliefs on him. Ippolit taunts Ivolgin, and the two jump toward each other, stopping only when Ganya screams.

This passage is decidedly childish and ridiculous. While much of Ippolit's bad behavior is explained by the fact that he is still young and immature, General Ivolgin and Ganya—who are both older—hardly act much better. Indeed, Ganya's decision to scream in order to stop the fight between his father and Ippolit recalls the desperate act of an infant who has no other way of asserting themselves.

General Ivolgin starts talking about Kapiton Eropegov, but Ganya declares that no such person has ever existed. Ivolgin is shaken by this and begins to stammer. Increasingly agitated, he demands that Kolya bring his bag and announces that he's leaving. An argument ensues between Ganya and Ippolit, in which Ippolit mocks Ganya and announces that he was planning to leave the Ptitsyns' that day anyway, as his mother has arranged an apartment for him. He notes that it will probably be the last time they speak, as he is about to die. Ganya suddenly feels bad. However, Ippolit then says that he purposefully decided to "make a fool out of" Ganya before he dies because he hates him.

The characters in the novel often experience sudden flashes of guilty, particularly when they are interacting with Ippolit or Myshkin and remember their respective illnesses. Yet these flashes usually remain merely that—a momentary burst of feeling—before subsiding into bitterness and hatred. Indeed, as Myshkin observed earlier in the novel, it is hard to sustain a revelation, including the revelation that other people should be treated with sympathy.

Ippolit enthusiastically lists all of Ganya's bad traits until Varya begs him to stop, at which point he leaves without saying anything more. Once he is gone, Ganya shows Varya a note from Aglaya, asking him to meet her in the park at 7 a.m. the next day and to bring Varya. Ganya cannot help but smirk in "triumph." Varya urges her brother to behave properly this time and not ruin the opportunity of speaking with Aglaya. They hear shouting and Varya tells Ganya to go outside and apologize to Ivolgin before anyone sees. However, Ivolgin is already in the street, and the neighbors are already listening.

Here, it becomes inescapably clear that Ganya will forever be hindered by his delusions and his ego. In the midst of the continually-unfolding disaster in his own home and the knowledge that General Ivolgin has disgraced himself in front of the Epanchins, he is still delusional enough to believe that Aglaya may now want to marry him—despite the fact that she has never liked him, and is now apparently engaged to someone else.

PART FOUR, CHAPTER THREE

General Ivolgin has often caused a big commotion like this, rarely with any serious consequences. This time, the whole incident is different. Leading up to the explosion, Ivolgin had been extra grouchy and sensitive. In the three days before he became very close with Lebedev, but then suddenly had a huge fight with him. It seems as if there is some secret that Ivolgin has been keeping. However, at this point the narrator suddenly stops to say that, because the reasons behind people's actions tend to be so complicated, sometimes it is better for narrators to simply relay a set of events rather than attempt to describe the motivations behind them.

The narrator's observation that they cannot necessarily understand or describe the motivations of the characters could be interpreted as a kind of literary trick to make the characters seem more three-dimensional and real. At the same time, it is widely known that in writing The Idiot, *Dostoevsky felt that the characters had lives of their own and did not plan out the plot in advance. In this sense, there may be truth in the idea that the characters have inner lives of their own.*

Lebedev returned from his trip to St. Petersburg the same day he left. For two days, Lebedev said nothing to Myshkin about the trip or the missing money, and spent all his time with Ivolgin. The two men drink, embrace each other, and generally "egg each other on." However, they then have a fight, and the next morning Ivolgin comes to see Myshkin, clearly very agitated. He speaks for 10 minutes, but Myshkin cannot understand anything he says. At the end, there are tears in his eyes, and he announces that Myshkin has "understood him." He asks if he might speak again with Myshkin for an hour, and while Myshkin suggests they could do so now, Ivolgin arranges it for the next day.

This is one of a great many occasions in which another character comes to Myshkin and confesses something that Myshkin cannot understand at all. Perhaps this is evidence of Myshkin's "idiocy," or the damage that Myshkin's epilepsy has done on his cognitive abilities. Another explanation might be that in their state of distress, these characters are not able to properly articulate and explain to Myshkin what is wrong.

After, Lebedev comes. He, along with Keller and Kolya earlier, all seem to want to congratulate Myshkin on something. Lebedev begins speaking cryptically about how he doesn't deserve Myshkin's trust. Myshkin then says he wants to tell Lebedev something about the money he lost, but Lebedev explains that he actually found it a while ago. He says that it was on the floor where his coat had been hanging, and that his wallet must have slipped out. Confused, Myshkin points out that Lebedev "searched every corner," but Lebedev insists that the wallet somehow just turned up.

Lebedev is obviously lying about the money, and considering his trip to St. Petersburg didn't involve him catching Ferdyshchenko and finding him guilty, this must mean that General Ivolgin stole the money. Perhaps Lebedev is choosing to protect Ivolgin on account of their long, close friendship. Yet the argument between the two men suggests that there might still be another twist to the story.

Myshkin asks why Lebedev didn't tell him that he found the money, and Lebedev explains that he actually put the wallet back where he found it as a kind of experiment. He hoped that General Ivolgin would find it, but in fact he never noticed it. However, that same day, Ivolgin became inexplicably angry and disappeared. Later that night, Lebedev noticed that the wallet was gone, too. However, it then reappeared in the skirt of his frock coat, having fallen through a pocket that tore on the inside. Lebedev notes that, mysteriously, the tear in the pocket looks "as if somebody had cut it with a penknife."

Although he might not be doing it out of any malicious feeling, Lebedev is obviously tormenting Ivolgin during this whole episode. Due to his alcoholism or his tendency to lie (or both), Ivolgin has a tenuous grasp on reality, and doesn't seem to be able to handle being tricked and manipulated by Lebedev in this way. Indeed, this is likely the cause of his explosive anger.

Lebedev says that he will "find" the wallet again the next day, but first wants to tease Ivolgin a little more. Myshkin asks why he is torturing Ivolgin, noting that the fact that Ivolgin put the wallet back shows that he's trying to get Lebedev's forgiveness. Persuaded by Myshkin, Lebedev says he will "find" the wallet that day, rather than waiting until the next. He gives it to Myshkin to keep until tomorrow. Myshkin advises that Lebedev shouldn't say anything directly, but just quietly remove the wallet from his skirt, so that Ivolgin figures out what is going on. Lebedev says he knows it would be better to follow Myshkin's kind advice, even though Ivolgin has been particularly rude lately.

This passage paints a strange picture of Lebedev's friendship with Ivolgin. Previously Lebedev has pledged absolute loyalty to Ivolgin, and this manifests itself in Lebedev not wanting to punish Ivolgin for stealing the wallet. At the same time, Lebedev is now tormenting Ivolgin and making him miserable, suggesting that his promise of a loyal friendship was an empty one.

PART FOUR, CHAPTER FOUR

Myshkin is late to his meeting with General Ivolgin and apologizes. Ivolgin returns a book that Myshkin lent him, which depicts the French occupation of Moscow from the perspective of an old soldier. Ivolgin then gravely informs Myshkin that his friendship with Lebedev is over, because Lebedev has lied to him and disrespected him. Myshkin points out that the lie Ivolgin is referring to—in which Lebedev claimed to have lost a leg in a war that took place before he was even born—was just a silly joke. Ivolgin then says that in the same year, when he himself was 10 years old, he pushed through a crowd and saw Napoleon dismounting from his horse.

Ironically, General Ivolgin has chosen to end his friendship with Lebedev because Lebedev has committed the exact same kinds of transgressions that Ivolgin himself does every day. Rather than mere hypocrisy, perhaps there is something about seeing his own behaviors turned back against him that Ivolgin finds deeply disturbing. Ivolgin may not be able to bear the confrontation with himself that this experience conjures.

Myshkin appeases General Ivolgin even though he knows that what he's saying isn't true. Ivolgin goes onto say that Napoleon even noticed him and remarked that he admired the young Ivolgin's pride. He then claims that he was became Napoleon's chamber-page. Myshkin comments that Ivolgin's memoirs would be "extremely interesting," and Ivolgin replies that he likes the idea of writing them. He then says that he urged Napoleon to beg for the forgiveness of Tsar Alexander I. With Myshkin's encouragement, Ivolgin continues to describe his life as Napoleon's chamber-page. He recounts the patriotic courage he supposedly showed, and mentions several occasions when Napoleon asked for his advice.

Even for General Ivolgin's standards, this story is the height of ridiculousness. It seems that as Ivolgin has sunk deeper and deeper into disgrace, isolation, and misery, his desire to tell outlandish and unbelievable stories has become more extreme. This could indicate that he has lost his grip on reality altogether. The fact that Myshkin encourages his delusions raises questions about whether one should be complicit in such fantasies.

As General Ivolgin continues with his story and describes his separation from Napoleon, he begins to cry real tears. Suddenly, Ivolgin notices that it's 2 p.m. and he's been talking for longer than he promised. Still overwhelmed by his own emotions, he wishes Myshkin well and leaves. That night, he receives a note in which Ivolgin informs him that he is "parting with him forever," but expresses his admiration and gratitude for their friendship. Myshkin hears that Ivolgin has simply locked himself up with his family, but also hears that he caused some kind of disturbance at the Epanchins' house.

In a way, General Ivolgin's dramatic goodbye note and decision to lock himself up recall Ippolit's suicide speech and Aglaya's memories of her fantasies of poisoning herself. Each of these characters melodramatically chooses to remove themselves from the lives of others rather than face responsibility for their actions and attempt to make amends.

Following the fight with Ganya, Ivolgin stands on the street, rambling nonsensically at Kolya and crying. Kolya begs that they go home, but Ivolgin goes off in another direction. Ivolgin bends toward Kolya and whispers, though once again his words don't make any sense. Suddenly Ivolgin goes completely purple, convulses, and falls into Kolya's arms. Realizing what is happening, Kolya shouts that his father is having a stroke.

This was likely not his actual plan, but General Ivolgin "succeeds" where Ippolit failed: he dramatically hurtles toward death, thereby leaving all those around him forced to cope with his absence and (very likely) feel guilty about not being there for him more when he was alive.

PART FOUR, CHAPTER FIVE

When Varya told Ganya about Myshkin's engagement to Aglaya, she exaggerated the extent to which it was actually confirmed. In reality, the information she received from the Epanchin sisters has come in the form of vague hints and allusions. When the Epanchins gradually came to realize that Aglaya perhaps loved the prince, General Epanchin was surprised, but kept an open mind. He pointed out that Myshkin "is a wonderful fellow," with a noble name and some money. Mrs. Epanchin, however, was furious. She called Myshkin a "sick idiot," a "fool," and an "unpardonable democrat," panicking at the idea of what their friends would think of the patch.

The fact that Mrs. Epanchin, who otherwise loves Myshkin so much that she treats him like her own son, switches in her attitude toward him so quickly demonstrates the disproportionate extent to which she cares about other people's opinions. As long as Myshkin is her personal friend she is happy to be extremely close with him. However, the idea of her family having a formal, public connection to him through marriage is abhorrent to her.

Alexandra and Adelaida, meanwhile, support the idea of Aglaya marrying Myshkin. Mrs. Epanchin blames their open-mindedness on the "cursed woman question." She goes to see Kammeny Island in St. Petersburg to see Princess Belokonsky, who is Aglaya's godmother. Belokonsky, who considers Mrs. Epanchin her inferior and "protégé," is not moved by Lizaveta's fears. She tells Mrs. Epanchin that she is having an overly dramatic reaction and that nothing is decided yet. Returning to Pavlovsk, Mrs. Epanchin attempts to calm down, with little success. She asks what happened when she was gone, and Alexandra and Adelaida say that Myshkin came over and played the card game "fools" with Aglaya.

Mrs. Epanchin clearly uses the "woman question" as a scapegoat through which to explain all the clashes of opinion she has with her daughters. At the same time, there may be some truth in her instinct to blame her daughters' differing opinions on a form of early feminism. Adelaida and Alexandra can see that Aglaya loves Myshkin, and they decide that this is more important than Aglaya pleasing her mother or having a match that makes the family look good to the rest of the world.

The sisters explain that Myshkin turned out to be an excellent player of the game. Although Aglaya cheated, she still could not beat him. She became rude, then furious, and stormed out of the room. With tears still in her eyes, she came back down again when Kolya arrived holding a hedgehog he had just bought from a peasant. Aglaya begged Kolya to sell her the hedgehog and he eventually conceded, although it turned out that the hedgehog in fact never belonged to him in the first place but to another schoolboy. Aglaya asked Kolya to bring Myshkin the hedgehog as "a token of her profoundest respect." Mrs. Epanchin is alarmed by this story and struggles to understand what it all means.

During this part of the novel, Aglaya is behaving more and more like a child, as encapsulated by the hedgehog saga. Of course, Myshkin himself has repeatedly been characterized as a child and a friend to children. At the same time, it is unclear whether this makes them a good match. Moreover, Myshkin's childlike nature is based in the fact that he is a totally pure and innocent person, whereas Aglaya has more of the bad qualities of children, such as irrational stubbornness.

In reality, when Kolya presented the hedgehog to Myshkin, the prince immediately switched from a state of utmost misery to carefree joy. Kolya assured Myshkin that Aglaya was in love with him, and Myshkin blushed. Mrs. Epanchin, meanwhile, "succumb[s] to a hysterical moment" and goes to lie in bed. When Myshkin arrives at the Epanchins' dacha that evening, he is disturbed to see that Aglaya isn't there. Myshkin chats nervously, knowing he is making a fool of herself. When Aglaya finally enters the room, she is sullen. She demands to know if Myshkin received the hedgehog and what he believes to be the meaning of it. Myshkin stammers, and Aglaya then asks if he is proposing to her.

This passage reveals that Varya was wrong: Myshkin and Aglaya were not actually engaged. Instead, the idea seemed to have entered people's heads without having taken place in reality. This further emphasizes the sense that Myshkin and Aglaya are like children who are pretending at having a courtship and engagement. It's possible that, due to their innocence and naïveté, they might be incapable of pulling off the real thing.

Nervously, Myshkin says that he hasn't formally proposed to her, but that he loves her. Following further prompting from Aglaya, he clarifies that he is asking to marry her, and "commotion" ensues. Mrs. Epanchin cries out in protest, but Aglaya shushes her. She asks Myshkin how he plans to make her happy. Myshkin doesn't reply, other than to say that he loves her. Aglaya then asks how much money he has (to cries of despair from members of her family). Myshkin replies that he has 125,000 roubles. Aglaya continues to interrogate him until her sisters suddenly burst out laughing, at which she laughs too, in an "almost hysterical" manner. Suddenly, she flees the room, and her mother and sisters run after her.

Aglaya appears to be trying to assert herself and take control of the situation like an adult, but she cannot sustain it. Her love for Myshkin, while seemingly very intense, does not encourage her to treat him kindly or reasonably. Instead, it provokes her to act in very strange, almost nonsensical ways. As the two get closer and the possibility of their marriage becomes imminent, Aglaya's behavior gets stranger and stranger.

Alone with Myshkin, General Epanchin asks him to explain. Myshkin replies that he loves Aglaya deeply and has done for a long time. The Epanchin women call out for the general, and he goes to find them embracing and crying happy tears. Aglaya says she doesn't love Myshkin, and that she now intends to apologize to him, but must do so alone. Going back, she asks for his forgiveness for her commitment to "an absurdity" which will ultimately amount to nothing. The other Epanchins come in at this point and look on nervously. Yet, for some reason, Myshkin seems incredibly happy, and spends the rest of the evening in a joyous mood.

Here, it appears as though Aglaya's strange behavior is not caused by her love for Myshkin alone, but rather her intensely conflicted feelings about him. Her behavior generally suggests that her claim not to love Myshkin cannot be true, but at the same time, she is also clearly very hesitant and concerned about the possibility of marrying him.

Myshkin is unusually lively that evening, talking at length about serious issues as well as telling amusing stories. Aglaya listens to him and barely speaks at all. Later, Mrs. Epanchin laments that it is clear Aglaya is completely in love with him. The next day Aglaya fights with Myshkin again and mocks him. She tells him he is "terribly uneducated." When Prince Shch. returns to Pavlovsk shortly later, he drops hints about (what he believes is) Aglaya's engagement to Myshkin, which enrages her. She declares that she doesn't plan on "replacing anyone's mistresses." Speaking alone with her husband, Mrs. Epanchin insists that they discuss Nastasya with Myshkin, although General Epanchin points out that everyone knows Nastasya is going to marry Rogozhin.

Finally, after such a long period of mysterious back-and-forth behavior from Aglaya, it becomes clear in this passage that her resistance to marrying Myshkin has nothing to do with her mother's disapproval, but rather her jealousy about Nastasya. Meanwhile, Myshkin's happiness and apparent relief after hearing that Aglaya doesn't want to marry him suggests that perhaps Aglaya has the right to worry.

Later, Myshkin runs into Ippolit by chance in the park. Ippolit points out that he was correct back when he said that Myshkin was in love. He then complains about the Epanchins, calling them "vain," "egoistic," and "ordinary." Ippolit asks if Myshkin hates him for not being worthy enough to suffer as he does. He then rants about Ganya, objecting to Ganya's claim that Ippolit's dramatic confession was all an act of ego. They briefly discuss historical figures who were tortured and executed by the state. Ippolit observes that Myshkin is "a perfect child," and goes to leave. He asks Myshkin how he should die, and Myshkin says that Ippolit should "forgive us our happiness."

There is an important parallel in what Myshkin and Ippolit express to each other in this passage. In asking if Myshkin thinks he is worthy of suffering, Ippolit references the Christian idea that suffering can make a person noble. (Clearly, this hasn't happened in Ippolit's case—at least certainly not in the traditional Christian sense.) Meanwhile, Myshkin poses a kind of converse question to Ippolit, asking if Ippolit is able to forgive those who will survive him and not suffer.

PART FOUR, CHAPTER SIX

The Epanchins are hosting a gathering at their dacha, which Princess Belokonsky will attend. General and Mrs. Epanchin are hoping that if Belokonsky comes to approve of Myshkin, the rest of "society" will follow suit. The evening they have planned is thus a way for a select number of their high-ranking friends to meet Myshkin. Most of the guests are rather old, although Evgeny is also coming as Belokonsky's escort. Through watching the Epanchins prepare for the event, Myshkin can tell that it—and particularly Belokonsky's presence—is of utmost importance to them.

The Epanchins may love Myshkin for who he is on a personal level, but when it comes to their public reputation they cannot resist trying to mould Myshkin into something he's not: a man who can charm elite, high society individuals, who by all accounts are rather judgmental and snobby. This attempt to force Myshkin to be something else seems doomed to end in disaster.

The day before the gathering, Aglaya speaks with Myshkin alone. She mocks Mrs. Epanchin's obsession with high society and its "rules," and especially her attachment to Belokonsky, whom Aglaya calls a "trashy little hag." Myshkin suggests that perhaps Aglaya is worried that he will fail to impress at the party, but Aglaya scoffs at this idea. She sarcastically begs him to break the expensive Chinese vase in their drawing room, which was a gift to Mrs. Epanchin. She promises that her mother would "lose her mind and cry in front of everybody" if anything happened to it. She tells Myshkin to sit near the vase and break it by gesturing while he speaks.

Aglaya's appetite for chaos can be read as a crude and rather immature way in which she wants to rebel against her family. While it understandable that she feels frustrated with their elitist whims, it is also not fair that she wants Myshkin to embarrass himself in order to fulfil her own desire to embarrass her family. Although her comment about the Chinese vase is a sarcastic joke, there seems to be an underlying sense in which Aglaya is fantasizing that it will actually happen.

Distressed, Myshkin is worried that he'll talk excessively from nerves and will indeed break the vase. However, he promises her that he will sit next to her and stay quiet the whole evening. Myshkin notices that he often sees flashes of darkness on Aglaya's face. He admits that the presence of a certain person still haunts them, but Aglaya immediately shushes him with a look of intense alarm.

Aglaya and Myshkin seem to indeed be haunted by Nastasya, since they can barely bring themselves to discuss her directly. This gives her an even greater power to disrupt and destroy their relationship.

That night, Myshkin sleeps badly, gripped by fear that he will have an epileptic fit at the party. He wakes up with a headache and an inexplicable desire to see Rogozhin, and then Ippolit. That morning Lebedev comes to see him, looking ragged and dirty. Lebedev tearfully tells an "incoherent" story, which culminates in Mrs. Epanchin throwing a letter he gave her at him. Lebedev's answer is highly unclear but seems to indicate that the letter was from Aglaya and addressed to Nastasya, or possibly Rogozhin. Myshkin is horrified. Lebedev eventually shows him the letter, which is actually the note Aglaya wrote to Ganya asking him and Varya to meet her in the park.

Something as simple as a note requesting for Ganya and Varya to meet Aglaya at the park might not seem like anything particularly scandalous. However, in the restrictive and gossip-hungry world of the novel, even very mild things can get turned into a dramatic source of scandal—particularly when the truth gets manipulated and exaggerated into being much more scandalous than it actually is.

Myshkin scolds Lebedev for interfering in this business and showing the letter to Mrs. Epanchin, thereby violating Aglaya's right to "correspond with whomever she likes." Eventually Lebedev departs, and Myshkin is left feeling deeply concerned by Aglaya's evident distress and jealousy. He also realizes that he doesn't trust Ganya, although he still intends to give him the letter. On the way he runs into Kolya and gives him the letter to give to Ganya. Back at home, Myshkin tells Vera, to her horror, that Lebedev took the letter.

Again, it is difficult to prevent even minor things from turning into scandal when there are so many busybodies ready to interfere in and speculate about other people's business. This demonstrates the underlying chaos of the social upper-class world in which The Idiot*'s characters engage.*

Two hours later Kolya runs to Myshkin with news of General Ivolgin's stroke. Hoping to help in some way, Myshkin stays at Nina's, where she and Varya remain constantly at Ivolgin's bedside. Ganya, meanwhile, is in a state of profound distress but will not go to see his father. Later that day Lebedev arrives, weeping and blaming himself for Ivolgin's stroke. Seeing how upset he is, Nina assures Lebedev that God will forgive him. During the day, Mrs. Epanchin sends two messengers to check on the general. When Myshkin arrives at the Epanchins' party, the first thing Mrs. Epanchin does is ask him about Ivolgin's health.

The fallout from General Ivolgin's stroke highlights that a person's imminent death does indeed shift people's attitudes in a major way. At the same time, Ganya's refusal to see Ivolgin shows that not even death is enough to transform the way that someone as bitter, resentful, and stubborn as Ganya feels toward his father.

Looking around him, Myshkin cannot recognize the terrible scene that Aglaya warned him about. In fact, he is quite charmed by the event. In reality, all this charm hides the fact that the people in attendance are "empty." Although they are all theoretically friends, some of the guests actually hate each other. Those present include a "little old dignitary" and his wife, a high-ranking general, a "baron or a count" with a German name, and an elderly, English-seeming man who is supposedly a distant relative of Mrs. Epanchin. This man is a "fancier of the female sex" and, strangely, Mrs. Epanchin harbors hope that he will propose to Alexandra.

The seductive nature of high society is so strong that it impacts Myshkin, someone famously uninterested in glamor, luxury, and elitist values. Perhaps Myshkin's willingness to believe that the people present are actually not so bad is less a product of him being charmed by high society and more due to his desire to see the good in everybody.

The younger generation of guests includes Prince Shch., Evgeny, and a wealthy heartbreaker named Prince N., who is 45. There are also a few guests who, like the Epanchins, are only middle-ranking yet have some connection to high society. Everyone at the party is in a happy mood. The Epanchins have decided not to introduce Myshkin to the dignitary, who is their benefactor, even though he would not be happy to learn that Aglaya was engaged to someone to whom he had not been introduced. Meanwhile, Prince N. prepares to tell a story that he believes will charm everyone. The Epanchin women look particularly special that evening. Aglaya flirts with Evgeny, but keeps looking at Myshkin, who remains quiet for a while. However then, without necessarily meaning to, he begins to speak.

The successful start to the party seems to be too good to be true, yet it would also be wrong to blame whatever happens next entirely on Myshkin. The Epanchins themselves have already committed social wrongs, from General and Mrs. Epanchin failing to introduce Myshkin to the dignitary to Aglaya flirting with Evgeny in order to get a rise out of Myshkin. The Epanchins might like to think of themselves as people with impeccable etiquette and manners, but this might not be so true after all.

PART FOUR, CHAPTER SEVEN

Quite unexpectedly, the dignitary mentions Pavlishchev, catching Myshkin's attention. General Epanchin comes over and explains that one of the guests, whose name is Ivan Petrovich, was Pavlishchev's cousin. After being introduced to him, Ivan comments that he remembers meeting Myshkin when he was a child. Ivan and Myshkin speak about what a wonderful man Pavlishchev was. During the conversation Myshkin becomes increasingly nervous, to the point that he can barely speak. He attracts more and more attention to himself, and soon the dignitary—among others—is staring at him.

Myshkin's descent into strange and awkward behavior can, in hindsight, be viewed as the inevitable result of the Epanchins making such a fuss over the party and Aglaya in particular frightening Myshkin into believing he will mess up. Ordinarily, Myshkin would be perfectly capable of having a normal conversation about Pavlishchev with Ivan Petrovich, but he is so nervous that all his social skills evaporate.

Ivan mentions that Pavlishchev converted to Catholicism, which horrifies Myshkin. The dignitary comments that Russians can be persuaded to convert out of fear. Myshkin declares that Catholicism is an "unchristian faith," and then says that it is even worse than atheism. He argues that the Catholic Church is nothing more than an extension of the Roman Empire, and that through its heretical obsession with violence, money, and power, it paved the way for atheism. Everyone is shocked by Myshkin's speech; Ivan stammers that he is exaggerating. However, Myshkin continues, arguing that socialism, like "its brother atheism," has also been produced by Catholicism.

While in another context Myshkin's speech about Catholicism might be welcomed as an entertaining and fascinating contribution, at a stiff high society event like this it is not welcome at all. This helps illustrate what the narrator means in calling the attendees of the party "empty": they have no interest in anything of real substance, only the superficial world of social niceties and glamor.

Feeling awkward, Ivan suggests that they talk about something else, but Myshkin refuses. He continues to talk, becoming more and more animated. He decries the ease with which Russians become atheists, and the passion with which they approach atheism when they do. Watching Myshkin get increasingly agitated, everyone who knows him is shocked by this break from his usual timid manner. Ever since Myshkin entered the room, he had been careful to stay as far away as possible from the Chinese vase and had sat in the opposite corner from it. Aglaya's words had convinced him that he would break it. However, while talking about Catholicism he becomes so impassioned that he forgets all about the vase and, without noticing, gradually migrated nearer to it.

It is almost as if Aglaya's words placed a kind of curse on Myshkin, wherein despite all his efforts not to, he was bound to do what she sarcastically prophesized. Of course, everything is made worse by the fact that Myshkin is not only nearing the vase, but doing so while giving an overenthusiastic lecture about the perils of Catholicism. While the points he is making are incisive, they are so out of place at this party that their only effect is to create a horrible awkwardness and tension.

Just as he is finishing his speech, Myshkin somehow makes a gesture that knocks the vase. It swings back and forth "as if undecided" about where it should fall, and then falls to the floor near the German. Everyone shouts and screams, and Myshkin is unspeakably mortified. Mainly, however, he is struck by disbelief that Aglaya's sarcastic prediction actually came true. As the broken pieces are cleared away, he notices Aglaya looking at him with horror. Mrs. Epanchin comes over and, to Myshkin's surprise, she (and General Epanchin) are laughing in a friendly manner. When Myshkin asks if Mrs. Epanchin really forgives him, she says it's not a big deal for a vase to break, when even human lives one day end.

Although Aglaya correctly predicted that Myshkin would break the vase, nothing about what happens next is as she foretold it. Where she said that Myshkin breaking the vase would fill her with delight, she is horrified. Meanwhile, Mrs. Epanchin, who would supposedly cry in front of everyone if the vase was broken, is being completely level-headed about it. This surprise reaction shows how much of an impact Myshkin's friendship and forgiving nature has had upon her.

Now crying, Myshkin asks if everyone forgives him for "*everything*," not just the broken vase. Various guests, including Princess Belokonsky, urge him to be calm, assuring him that they are not angry. Myshkin explains that he was very nervous about meeting these high-ranking elders. He notes that he'd heard many negative things about this group of people, including that they were retrograde and shallow, with "ridiculous habits." Yet he has been pleasantly surprised to find himself surrounded by worthy, moral people. At this point several guests remark that he is rambling again and wonder if he will stop. However, Myshkin insists on continuing.

Although the broken vase does not turn out to be as much of a disaster as everyone feared, Myshkin still manages to wreak havoc on the party by voicing all the negative things about the guests that he heard before coming. Indeed, it is clear that, for some reason, Myshkin has completely lost control of himself and is overcome by a surge of emotions. While the Epanchins are forgiving, the other guests find this rather alarming.

Myshkin says he knows he is like a child, and cannot express himself in the right way, which is why he promised Aglaya that he would stay silent. However, he has concluded that there is no point in being embarrassed over being "ridiculous," because this is just the way people are. Furthermore, if everyone accepts that they are ridiculous, then they can forgive each other more easily. He notes that those present should "become servants, in order to be elders." He then wonders how it's possible to be unhappy, because simply looking at a tree or loving a person makes one so happy. At this point, Myshkin falls to the floor. He is having an epileptic fit.

The end of this passage provides the explanation for Myshkin's bizarre behavior. The depiction of the leadup to Myshkin's fit helps illustrate the connection between his illness and his spiritual insight. While in one sense Myshkin was rambling nonsensically earlier, in another way he was actually preaching. The profound insight that Myshkin possesses just before having a fit shows that his illness is actually a kind of spiritual tool, not just an affliction.

As the guests leave, they express mixed opinions about Myshkin. Mrs. Epanchin concludes that Myshkin and Aglaya cannot possibly get married. However, when Aglaya says that she will never marry him and that he is a "stranger" to her, Mrs. Epanchin chastises her for so callously throwing away their friendship.

Again, neither Mrs. Epanchin nor Aglaya can resolve their mixed feelings about Myshkin. They both seem to love and hate him at the same time. Not only can they not resolve their own feelings, but—in Mrs. Epanchin's case—she chastises Aglaya for also feeling conflicted.

PART FOUR, CHAPTER EIGHT

Following the fit, Myshkin feels very sad. Vera comes to take care of him, but when he kisses her hand she becomes embarrassed and leaves. Before leaving, she tells him that Lebedev had earlier gone to see General Ivolgin, who is likely about to die. Later, Lebedev comes to visit Myshkin, as does Kolya, who asks Myshkin to tell him everything. Myshkin makes an effort to do so, but Kolya still seems to think he is withholding something. In the afternoon, the Epanchins come, and Mrs. Epanchin tells Myshkin to come and see them if he starts to feel better. Myshkin notices that Aglaya looks pale, as if she hasn't slept well. After they leave, Vera comes with a message from Aglaya: she asks that Myshkin stay at home until late, without leaving even for a second.

The drawn-out nature of Aglaya and Myshkin's (non)engagement is obviously very painful for both of them. Part of the problem is that they can't communicate directly with each other, and have in fact never been able to do so. Often they must rely on letters, notes, and messages conveyed via third parties. However, even when they are speaking to each other face-to-face, they have rarely been able to directly articulate their feelings. This creates an impasse between them.

Half an hour after the Epanchins' visit, Ippolit comes in and collapses straight into a chair. Myshkin tries to speak to him, but Ippolit does not respond. Suddenly Ippolit announces that he's leaving, and then clarifies that he means he is going to lie down for the final time today and die. He then says that earlier he saw Aglaya meeting with Ganya in the park. He remarks on Myshkin's lack of surprise, but then continues with his story. He says that he also had a meeting on the park bench that day, but that when he sat down to Aglaya he saw Ganya and Varya coming along. However, Aglaya's encounter with the brother and sister only lasted a second. She expressed gratitude for their "sincere and friendly feelings."

Ippolit obviously delights in spreading this gossip to Myshkin, and is disappointed when Myshkin doesn't have a more dramatic reaction. Myshkin's lack of surprise may be the product of his calm, open nature, yet it might also be caused by a general sense of exhaustion—not only from his illness, but from the never-ending saga of his and Aglaya's on-again, off-again engagement.

Ganya was humiliated, and Varya had to drag him away. Ippolit himself was there to arrange a meeting between Aglaya and Nastasya. He says that the night before he dreamed that Rogozhin smothered him to death with a wet rag. Ippolit expresses surprise that Myshkin doesn't know about the meeting between Nastasya and Aglaya, for which Nastasya is coming all the way from St. Petersburg. In disbelief, Myshkin asks if Aglaya is really going to see Nastasya that evening, and Ippolit says he believes this is what will happen. He thinks that the meeting will take place around 7 or 8 p.m., and suggests that Myshkin send Kolya as a spy. Ippolit leaves.

While only a moment ago Myshkin was resigned, on hearing about the imminent meeting between Nastasya and Aglaya he has a radical shift in mood. Indeed, it seems that at this point the only person capable of provoking such an intense reaction in him is Aglaya. This could either indicate that he is in love with her, or that she has a particular, demonic hold on him that makes him lose all sense of reason.

Alone, Myshkin is left in a state of horror. He is overwhelmed by Nastasya's repeated capacity to show up and "snap his whole destiny like a rotten thread." He is so afraid of Nastasya that he feels as if he is losing his grip on reality. Things only become clear again that evening, when Aglaya comes to the terrace of his dacha, looking pale. She tells Myshkin she can see that he has already been warned about what's happening, and guesses that it was Ippolit who told him. She insists that he accompany her, and he follows "like a slave." They arrive at Darya's *dacha*, and Rogozhin lets them in, announcing that they the only four people in the house.

Here, the narrator employs decidedly dramatic language to describe how Myshkin is controlled by both Aglaya and Nastasya. While Nastasya can alter his fate in an instant as if snapping an old thread, Myshkin's attachment to Aglaya is compared to enslavement. Both metaphors serve to underline how little control Myshkin has over his own life thanks to these two exceptionally strong-willed women.

Aglaya tells Nastasya that although she doesn't like her, she hasn't come to argue. She says that it is clear from the letters Nastasya wrote that she is a deeply selfish person. Myshkin, on the other hand, is the most pure-hearted person Aglaya has ever met, and he was hurt by Nastasya's abandonment of him. She asks Nastasya how she dared to write her letters and interfere with her life. She also asks why Nastasya didn't quietly break ties with Totsky if she really wanted to be an "honest woman," rather than doing it so dramatically. Nastasya scorns Aglaya for judging her. The argument escalates, with both women hurling insults at each other.

In this moment, Aglaya reveals feeling that she has been keeping secret for the entirety of the novel thus far. This passage stands out for being one of the times in which she speaks most straightforwardly about her admiration of Myshkin. It seems obvious that all her insults and teasing of him were indeed attempts to conceal the nature of her true feelings.

Nastasya starts crying, and taunts that Myshkin would marry her if she asked him to, while Aglaya would be left alone. She tells Rogozhin to leave, and declares that if Myshkin doesn't come to her that instant then Aglaya can have him. Myshkin, who does not fully understand the position in which he is being put, cries out in anguish about how miserable Nastasya is. He does nothing, but nonetheless Aglaya runs out of the room, followed by Rogozhin. Myshkin goes to follow her, but Nastasya grips him and faints in his arms. Returning, Rogozhin wakes Nastasya by pouring a glass of water on her. Laughing maniacally, Nastasya shouts "Mine!" and tells Rogozhin to leave. He does, and Myshkin stays, comforting Nastasya.

Even though part of Nastasya seems to genuinely want Myshkin to marry Aglaya and the two of them to be happy together, in the end she cannot help but exercise her power one last time. Perhaps this is simply revenge for the cruel words Aglaya just hurled at her. On some level, it must also be a product of Nastasya's trauma. Reduced to state of total powerlessness by Totsky as an adolescent, she cannot help but assert and reassert the power she has over men even when this clashes with her actual desires.

PART FOUR, CHAPTER NINE

Two weeks pass. The story of what happened to Myshkin has been told, in many different versions, all over town. The basic tale is that the prince, having provoked a scandal at "an honorable and well-known house," was abandoned by his fiancée (Aglaya), lured away by a "well-known tart" (Nastasya), and agreed to marry her in Pavlovsk despite the enormous disgrace this would involve. Other versions of the story suggest that Myshkin could barely speak Russian and that he had been driven mad by "modern nihilism." Another holds that Myshkin broke the vase on purpose in order to publicly humiliate Aglaya.

This passage illustrates the extent to which the truth of a given matter is obscured by the way it circulates as gossip. By presenting the inaccurate rumors before explaining the truth of what actually happened, the narrator creates a sense of mystery, reminding us that our access to the characters' inner thoughts is inherently limited. It is clear that some of these rumors are obviously wrong, but the truth also remains concealed.

There are rumors that Myshkin loves Aglaya but is actually a nihilist himself, which leads him to want to marry a "fallen woman" because the "woman question" makes him prefer her to a virtuous young lady. Because of all this contradictory speculation, it is hard to say exactly what Myshkin's true reasons were for getting engaged to Nastasya. The wedding is set to be quick and expensive, with Keller, Lebedev, and another friend in charge of planning. Keller will be Myshkin's groomsman, while Burdovsky, at Nastasya's request, will attend to the bride.

Everything about Myshkin and Nastasya's wedding is strange and surreal. There is a strong sense in which it shouldn't be happening conveyed by the fact that no information is given about why Myshkin is marrying her. This impression is further emphasized by the hasty nature of the wedding planning and the odd (if not entirely surprising) selection of people chosen for the wedding party.

There are rumors that the Epanchins have ended their friendship with Myshkin, while Aglaya is in a "terrible state" and is hiding at Nina's. However, when Aglaya sees that her mother and sisters are not angry with her but just sad for her, she agrees to come home with them. During this time, Ganya decides to confess his love to Aglaya, who, despite her torment, still laughs at him for being so delusional and runs away. At this point everyone feels "indignant" toward Myshkin, even Kolya, Vera, Keller, and Lebedev. About a week after the incident at Darya's, and the day after the Epanchins have left Pavlovsk, Evgeny comes to see Myshkin.

What Myshkin has supposedly done to Aglaya is thought to be so terrible that even those friends who love him completely feel angry and resentful of him. This is strange, as all of these people know that Myshkin would never purposefully hurt anyone, let alone Aglaya, whom everyone knows he loves. Yet the nature of scandal means that people turn against those they have loved and trusted for a long time.

Evgeny tells Myshkin that Aglaya was sick for three days after what happened at Darya's. General and Mrs. Epanchin have been considering going abroad after Adelaida's wedding, which will take place in the autumn. Evgeny asks how Myshkin could have abandoned Aglaya, although he concedes that nothing could be done to stop Nastasya's deranged behavior. He chastises Myshkin for having an inappropriate attitude toward Nastasya, one that was too democratic and egalitarian, and thus overly influenced by "the woman question." He says he understands Myshkin's intention in wanting to express support for Nastasya, whose corruption was Totsky's fault, not her own. However, this does not excuse Nastasya's "demonic pride" and "greedy egoism."

Evgeny stands out as being the only character who actually speaks directly to Myshkin about the scandal and clearly explains his (complex and contradictory, but nonetheless lucid) feelings. Evgeny feels sympathy for everyone involved, which highlights that he is a good person. However, he, like most other characters in the novel, is also biased by his suspicion of "the woman question." He is convinced that this must be the reason for Myshkin's abandonment of Aglaya, when in fact this is not the case.

Myshkin admits that he's entirely at fault, but also explains that he didn't actually take any action at Nastasya's. Aglaya ran away, Nastasya fainted, and afterward, he was banned from seeing Aglaya again. He adds that if he'd left Nastasya when she fainted, she would have killed herself. Myshkin suddenly tries to rush out, saying he needs to speak with Aglaya. He tells Evgeny that he secretly hates Nastasya's face, that she scares him and that he believes she is insane. Evgeny asks Myshkin why he is marrying someone out of fear, but Myshkin replies: "I love her with all my soul," calling Nastasya "a complete child."

Myshkin's feelings about Nastasya are basically impossible for the other characters—even wise and sympathetic ones like Evgeny—to understand. This is because he is alone in seeing her as an innocent "child" rather than a demon, an insane person, or a "fallen woman."

When asked by Evgeny, Myshkin confirms that he loves both Nastasya *and* Aglaya, and that he somehow needs to make Aglaya understand the truth. He demands that they go to see Aglaya but Evgeny reminds him that she is no longer in Pavlovsk, and when Myshkin asks him to deliver a letter to her, Evgeny refuses. They part ways, and Evgeny murmurs that Myshkin is a "poor idiot."

Myshkin's love for Aglaya and Nastasya is not a form of romantic indecision or a desire to have it both ways. Instead, it is a manifestation of the pure, universal love he feels for all humankind (though with particular intensity for these two women).

PART FOUR, CHAPTER TEN

Some people believe that General and Mrs. Epanchin sent Evgeny to see Myshkin, though this is only a rumor. While all this has been happening Ivolgin died, and Kolya is now busy arranging the burial. Myshkin spends many hours each day at Nina's, and attends the burial service for Ivolgin. Whenever he is out in public, people point at him and whisper. Myshkin feels eyes on him again, and tells Lebedev he feels that Rogozhin is watching him. Lebedev notes that Rogozhin was at the church during the service. Myshkin realizes that Rogozhin must have been avoiding him, as this is the first time he has seen him since Darya's.

Considering that the last time Myshkin felt Rogozhin's eyes on him, Rogozhin tried to kill him, this passage is deeply ominous. It seems almost impossible that Rogozhin would let Nastasya go without attempting to steal her back, potentially by violent means. Regardless of what he is planning, his particular way of staring at Myshkin gives the effect that he is always watching, waiting for a moment to pounce.

Nina suggests that Myshkin and Nastasya's wedding should be more private, but this is not what Nastasya wants. Keller, meanwhile, warns Myshkin that there are people who are conspiring against him, and even want to put him in jail. The day before Myshkin's wedding, Lebedev comes to "repent." It turns out that he had been conspiring to stop the marriage and had tried many routes, including even bringing a doctor to Myshkin. The doctor and Myshkin ended up having a long conversation, as the doctor was fascinated by stories of Myshkin's treatment in Switzerland, as well as more recent occurrences such as Ippolit's attempted suicide. In the end, the doctor concluded that there was no reason for Myshkin not to marry Nastasya.

This comic twist indicates that people are so confused by Myshkin's decision to marry Nastasya that they are ready to believe he is insane. Myshkin's immense charm, however, means that the doctor ended up not believing this himself, and letting Myshkin go ahead with the wedding. On the other hand, perhaps it's simply true that while Myshkin's decision to marry Nastasya may be surprising, there is nothing insane about it.

Ippolit also spends a lot of time with Myshkin in the days leading up to the wedding. Ippolit is extremely sick at this point, and knows he will soon die. He urges Myshkin to "beware of Rogozhin," and Myshkin is left feeling terrified. This escalates when Ippolit suggests that Myshkin might even murder Aglaya out of jealousy. This conversation happens the night before Myshkin's wedding. The last time they see each other before their marriage, Myshkin notices that Nastasya is melancholic. However, they have made a silent agreement to never discuss their feelings with one another. Myshkin realizes that Nastasya knows how much he loves Aglaya. However, by the time they say goodbye, Nastasya has become excited over the arrival of her wedding outfit.

As in his relationship with Aglaya, Myshkin does not discuss his feelings with Nastasya. This clearly has disastrous consequences, as both of them remain a complete mystery to each other. Furthermore, neither is able to provide emotional support to the other, as they don't even understand what's wrong. Overall, this passage emphasizes that Myshkin and Nastasya's wedding is likely a terrible idea, and that Myshkin is perhaps not suitable to be anyone's husband after all.

Nastasya reveals that there may be a parade of people mocking the wedding on the day, and is determined to "outshine them all with the taste and wealth of her finery." Secretly, she also hopes that Aglaya will see her, too. She and Myshkin leave each other, but at 11 p.m. that night, Darya fetches Myshkin to inform him that Nastasya has locked herself in her room in hysterical tears. When Myshkin arrives, Nastasya exclaims: "What am I doing to you!" He stays with her for an hour, after which point she is calm and happy again.

While Nastasya feels threatened by Aglaya, her main point of concern over the wedding seems to be the idea that she is going to corrupt Myshkin. She wants to believe that she can have a happy marriage to a good, loving, innocent person, but because she is convinced that she is permanently corrupted as a result of Totsky's abuse, she keeps being stricken by doubt.

The next day, the wedding ceremony is due to happen at 8 p.m. There is no planned reception, only a gathering of a handful of people. Myshkin sets off for the church at 7:30 p.m. It seems that everything is going according to plan. When Keller goes to get Nastasya, he finds her looking "pale as a corpse." He takes her to the church, but just as she is stepping out of her carriage, she throws herself into the crowd, where Rogozhin has suddenly appeared. Nastasya begs for him to "save" her and take her away. He immediately pays the carriage driver 100 roubles to take her to the station, offering another 100 if they get there in time to catch the train.

The description of the beginning of Nastasya and Myshkin's wedding is very brief, and the resulting impression is that the event is over before it even starts. It remains unclear whether Nastasya made a spontaneous decision to run away, whether she hoped or planned to see Rogozhin in the crowd, or whether she ever planned to actually marry Myshkin in the first place.

In an instant, they are gone. At the station, Rogozhin pays a passing girl 50 roubles for her plain outfit, so Nastasya can wear it and avoid attention due to her wedding dress. Meanwhile, back at the church, everyone is in a state of shock. Only Myshkin leaves somewhat calmly, and surprises everyone by answering people's stunned and often rather invasive questions in a simple, open manner. Back at Lebedev's, a huge crowd gathers, and tea is served. Everyone expresses their opinions, some of which are very bold. Lebedev gets drunk, and incoherently declares that God "saved" Myshkin.

What first appeared to be an absolute disaster and scandal is salvaged by Myshkin's calm, pleasant attitude. In this sense, this scene repeats what has happened at several earlier points in the novel, for example when Burdovsky and his crew aggressively accuse Myshkin of robbery, only to find themselves invited to tea once the whole thing blows over.

Kolya helps Myshkin change back into his normal clothes, and then, at 10: 30 p.m., leaves him. Vera passes by Myshkin's room and sees him sitting alone, with his face in his hands. She goes and puts her hand on his shoulder, and he asks her to wake him at 7 a.m. so he can get the first train to St. Petersburg the next morning. When she goes back in the morning, she finds him cheerful.

Myshkin is once again left in a position of extreme isolation. No one can understand exactly what has happened to him—perhaps not even Myshkin himself. This alienation further emphasizes the divide between Myshkin's innocence and the other flawed characters around him.

PART FOUR, CHAPTER ELEVEN

In St. Petersburg, Myshkin goes straight to Rogozhin's house. Rogozhin's mother says her son is not at home. Myshkin tries to find out if he came back the night before with Nastasya, but she will not tell him. Myshkin then asks the caretaker, who informs him that Rogozhin was at home the day before, although it's possible that he's gone out now. Myshkin then stands outside on the street for a while, and for a second thinks he thinks he sees Rogozhin's face peering through a blind, but within a second it is gone. Myshkin then sets off for the neighborhood where he knows Nastasya had been staying with a friend of hers, an old teacher's widow.

Myshkin is clearly determined to find Rogozhin and Nastasya, but it is unclear to what purpose. It doesn't seem likely that he will try to win Nastasya back. At the same time, his reason for marrying her in the first place was a desire to protect her amidst fears for her safety. Perhaps this is the same reason that has drawn him back to St. Petersburg and into a potentially dangerous situation.

Myshkin is shocked to learn that the none of the people at the widow's house had seen Nastasya there that day or the day before. They are all desperate to know about the wedding, and he explains the whole story. The next day Myshkin goes back to Rogozhin's house, where the caretaker tells him that Rogozhin went to Pavlovsk that morning and may not be back for a week. Myshkin then goes to see Nastasya's beautiful German friend, only to find that she and Nastasya have had a fight and are not speaking. Myshkin begins to have a strange feeling, and returns to Rogozhin's, before again going to the widow's apartment.

Myshkin's devotion to Nastasya, who has repeatedly abandoned him and ruined his life, shows how selfless and innocent he truly is. Yet it also reveals the extent to which his innocence is both a form of foolishness and insight. He is putting himself at risk by trying to track down Nastasya and Rogozhin. Furthermore, all the evidence indicates that Nastasya doesn't want to be found. However, the strange feeling Myshkin has indicates that something might be terribly wrong.

Myshkin asks the women at the apartment to show him Nastasya's room. There he finds a copy of *Madame Bovary* and a card table. The women tell him that Nastasya plays cards there every night with Rogozhin. Now, the cards they use to play with are missing. The women advise Myshkin to keep checking in at Rogozhin's house, and the widow offers to go to Darya's dacha in Pavlovsk herself. Myshkin returns to the inn where he is staying in "inexpressible anguish." He leaves the inn again, but has only walked 50 steps when Rogozhin grabs him. Rogozhin insists that they walk to his house but on opposite sides of the street, so that they are not seen together.

The placement of Madame Bovary in Nastasya's room is very important. Published in 1856 (only a few years before The Idiot*) by the French novelist Gustave Flaubert, the novel tells the story of an adulterous woman who strives to escape her dreary and oppressive life through romantic passion, and ends up killing herself. There are obvious parallels that this novel shares with situations in* The Idiot*, both to Nastasya's striving and to Aglaya's dreams of a grander life than marriage and domesticity.*

At the house, Rogozhin said he lied to the caretaker and said he was in Pavlovsk. He says he knew Myshkin kept coming to the house, and hid from him. When Myshkin asks where Nastasya is, Rogozhin replies that she is "here." After they speak a little, Myshkin again demands to know where Nastasya is, and Rogozhin points to a curtain. Myshkin moves past it to look, and sees a figure lying in bed, completely still. Clothes lie scattered all around the bed, and the whole scene is "terribly still." Rogozhin leads him out of the room. He notices that Myshkin is shaking, which might mean he is going to have a fit.

Nastasya's murder is not described in any direct terms, but only by the eerie stillness left by the sight of her dead body. This provides a return to the novel's earlier considerations of death, resurrection, and Holbein's painting The Dead Christ. *The absolute stillness of Nastasya's corpse prompts the same harrowing, atheistic question as the painting: what if there is no redemption, no resurrection—just death?*

Sitting together again, Rogozhin tells Myshkin: "I just can't think what I'm going to do with you now." He admits that he killed Nastasya, and that no one in the house knows that she spent the night there. He says that he and Myshkin should spend the night there with Nastasya, and expresses concern that people might hear him if he has a fit. Although there is only one bed, he will arrange pillows on the floor. He asks Myshkin if there's a smell in the room, and Myshkin replies that he doesn't know.

Rogozhin says very little about Nastasya's murder. The reader never finds out when exactly he did it or what the immediate trigger was. In a sense, though, it doesn't matter, because his murdering Nastasya has been predicted from the very beginning of the novel. It was the fate that inevitably awaited both of them.

Myshkin asks if Rogozhin killed Nastasya with the same knife he used to try and attack Myshkin, and Rogozhin says he did. Myshkin then asks if he wanted to kill Nastasya before the wedding; Rogozhin says he doesn't know. They hear footsteps and both scramble to shut the door. Myshkin whispers that he wanted the cards Nastasya and Rogozhin played with, and Rogozhin gives them to him. They wait silently for half an hour, before Rogozhin suddenly bursts out laughing remembering how Nastasya whipped the officer at the Pavlovsk vauxhall. Many hours pass, and Rogozhin weeps. Eventually, people burst through the door to find Rogozhin unconscious, and Myshkin in the same state of "idiocy" as when he first arrived in Switzerland.

Even after finding out that Rogozhin murdered Nastasya, Myshkin does not abandon him, try to seek help, or attempt to alert the police. Instead he stays with him, asking him questions about the crime. This connects Myshkin to the old state councilor in Moscow mentioned earlier in the novel, who would go to see those about to be sent to Siberia. Myshkin's profound moral goodness allows him to spend time with Rogozhin as a person, not only a killer, although ultimately the whole ordeal has a severely negative impact on his health.

PART FOUR, CHAPTER TWELVE: CONCLUSION

The teacher's widow went straight to Darya in Pavlovsk, and the two women then called Lebedev, who arranged for the St. Petersburg police to enter Rogozhin's apartment. Rogozhin suffers from "brain fever" for two months, after which he is tried for Nastasya's murder. He is sentenced to 15 years' hard labor in Siberia, and his fortune goes to his brother. Lebedev, Keller, Ganya, Ptitsyn, and several other characters in the novel largely go on living as before. The narrator notes, "We have almost nothing to tell about them." Ippolit dies two weeks after Nastasya is killed. Traumatized by everything, Kolya becomes extremely close to Nina.

As the beginning of the conclusion shows, the end to the novel can hardly be considered a happy one. In most cases, whatever positive transformations the characters underwent through their friendship with Myshkin unravel, either because they were unable to sustain the wisdom they learned from him or because they were so traumatized by the cruel absurdity of life that they are reduced to a state of helplessness.

Myshkin, meanwhile, seeks help from Evgeny, who gladly agrees to financially support him for more treatment at Professor Schneider's institution. Evgeny regularly visits Myshkin there, but the prognosis doesn't look good—the illness may be incurable. Evgeny has developed a close friendship with Vera and writes her letters to update her on Myshkin's health every time he goes to Switzerland. After a whirlwind romance with an exiled Polish count in Paris, Aglaya marries him, against the wishes of her parents. The next time Evgeny goes to Switzerland, Prince Shch. And all the Epanchins (except the general) visit too.

Myshkin's return to Switzerland is bittersweet. Although we know that Myshkin was happy there, in a way all the progress he made in Russia was undone, as he falls back into a state of incapacitated "idiocy" that is now permanent (as indicated by Schneider's admission that the condition might be incurable).

The Epanchins all express their sincere gratitude to Evgeny for taking care of Myshkin. They then explain that Aglaya's marriage turned out to be a disaster. The "count" was not actually a count at all, but had so enchanted Aglaya that she ended up converting to Catholicism. The enormous wealth he claimed to have also did not exist. Six years after the marriage, the "count" and his friend, a Catholic priest, have managed to estrange Aglaya from her family. Mrs. Epanchin is miserable abroad, and longs to return to Russia. She calls Europe "one big fantasy."

Aglaya's fate reiterates some of the novel's main points, one of which is the dangers of Catholicism. More importantly, her disaster of a marriage emphasizes that rebelling against social norms often leads to catastrophe—particularly when such rebellions are embodied by young women.

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